


ATANTA MURALS



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# AJANTA MURALS





यथा सुमेरुः प्रवरो नगानां  
यथाण्डजानां गरुडः प्रधानः ।  
यथा जनानां प्रवरः क्षितीश-  
स्तथा कलानामिह चित्रकल्पः ॥

‘As Sumeru is the chief of the mountains, as Garuda is the chief of those born out of eggs, as the king is the chief of men, even so in this world is the practice of painting the chief of all arts.’

—*Vishnudharmottara*, third *khaṇḍa*, xliii, 39



# AJANTA MURALS

*An album of eighty-five reproductions in colour*

ILLUSTRATED TEXT BY

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## PREFACE

**T**HE PRESENT ALBUM is not intended to present a complete series of reproductions of the mural paintings of Ajanta. For that one has still to turn to the excellent four-volume portfolio brought out by the Hyderabad Government between the years 1930 and 1955. The aim here has been to present some outstanding and representative paintings of Ajanta in a convenient form so as to promote their appreciation. In such cases the selection can never suit everyone's taste, but we have done our best.

**N**OR is the text to be regarded as a complete treatise on Ajanta. The topics dealt with therein are designed only to be indicative of the vastness of the subjects.

**T**HE chapters in the text have been written by different hands. While SHRI M. N. DESHPANDE, Director, School of Archaeology, Archaeological Survey of India, who has a wide knowledge of the west-Indian caves, has contributed the bulk (three chapters), two chapters have been contributed each by DR. B. B. LAL, Archaeological Chemist in India of the same Survey, who has been dealing with the chemical treatment and preservation of mural paintings and allied matters all over India for a long time, and by MISS INGRID AALL, art-historian from Oslo, who was working in India on Indian art a few years back. I am responsible for only one chapter, Introduction, and the Bibliography.

**A**LL the photographs reproduced in the Album were taken by SHRI S. G. TIWARI, Senior Photographer, Archaeological Survey of India, assisted by SHRI SURESH JADHAV, formerly Photographer in the South-western Circle of the Survey. SHRI S. P. BAUKHANDI, Artist in the same Circle, made himself useful in many ways in the production of the work: he prepared the line-drawings, checked, together with MISS AALL and also independently, the fidelity of the colour on the proofs of the blocks and advised the printers about its rectification.

**M**Y sincere thanks are due to SHRI SAILENDRANATH GUHA RAY, Director-in-charge, SHRI J. P. GUHA, Sales Manager, and Shri S. K. Mitra Rai, Account Executive, Sree Saraswaty Press Ltd., where all the processing and printing have been done, for their intimate and personal interest in producing the best results. In fact, SHRI GUHA visited Ajanta (at no cost to us) for the purpose of comparing the colour on the proofs of blocks with that of the murals and substantially corrected them so as to ensure the nearest possible approach to the originals.

**F**INALLY, I have to thank SHRI M. N. DESHPANDE, SHRI H. SARKAR, at present Assistant Editor in the Secretariate of the Twenty-sixth International Congress of Orientalists, SHRI M. C. JOSHI, Assistant Superintendent, Archaeological Survey of India, and SHRI S. R. VARMA of the Headquarters office of the Survey, for their help in seeing the work through the press. In addition, SHRI JOSHI has also prepared the Index.

*The 20th August, 1966*

A. GHOSH



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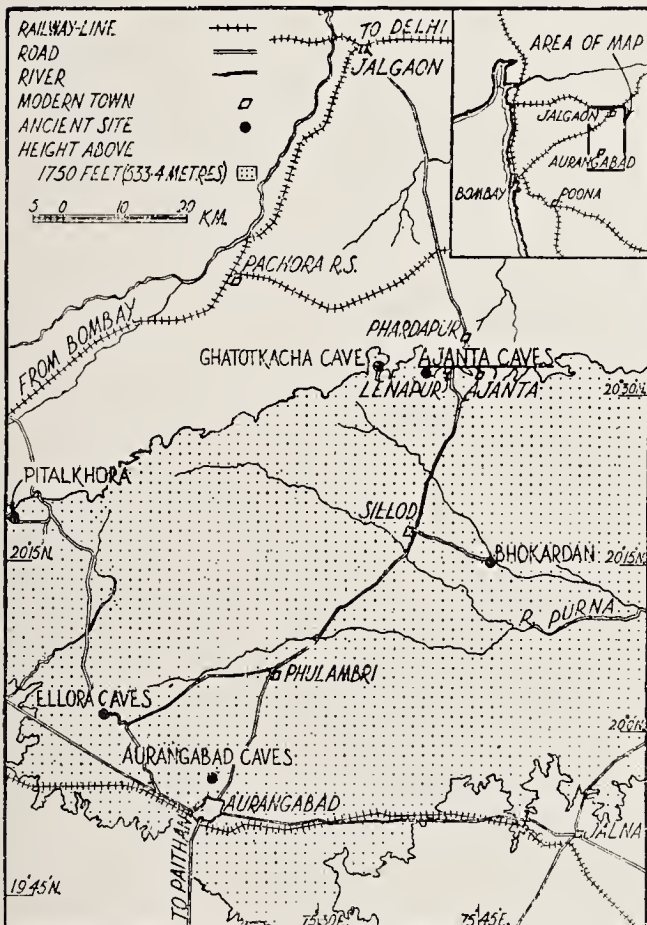
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# AJANTA MURALS

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE WORD AJANTA conjures up before one's vision a dream of beauty—of caves hidden in the midst of a lonely glen with a streamlet flowing down below, caves that were scooped out into the heart of the rock so that the pious Buddhist monks wanting a retreat from the busy world could live and pray there, caves that they embellished with architectural details with a mastery over the chisel, with sculpture of no mean order and, above all, with paintings of infinite charm. Rolling hills of the Maharashtra plateau encompass them and the streamlet Waghora, after a precipitous fall, cuts a gorge in front, later to emerge into an open valley. Looking down from the top of the opposite hill, from a spot called the View-point, one sees the

hill with the caves spread out in a curve and the caves themselves like dark recesses punctured into the rock.<sup>1</sup>



Map showing Ajanta and its neighbourhood

**T**HE only reference to the caves in ancient literature is that by Hiuen Tsang, the celebrated Chinese pilgrim who stayed in India for fifteen years in the first half of the seventh century, when Ajanta was approaching its decline. Though he did not visit Ajanta, his description is interesting: 'In the east of this country (Mo-ha-la-ch'a = Mahārāshṭra) was a mountain range, ridges one above another in succession, tiers of peaks and sheer summits. Here was a monastery the base of which was in a dark defile, and its lofty halls and deep chambers were quarried in the cliff and rested on the peak, its tiers of halls and storeyed terraces had the cliff on their back and faced the ravine. This monastery had been built by A-chê-lo of West India... Within the establishment was a large temple above 100 feet high in which was a stone image of the Buddha above seventy feet high; the image was surmounted by a tier of seven canopies

<sup>1</sup> The caves of Ajanta, pronounced *Ajantā*, *Ajintā* or *Ajinhā* (latitude 20°30' North; longitude 75°40' East), are situated on the northern fringe of the Maharashtra plateau, in District Aurangabad of present-day Maharashtra State (see map). The height of the caves is roughly 430 metres above mean sea-level. They are approached by road either from Aurangabad (106 kilometres) or from Jalgaon (61 kilometres). For further topographical observations see below, page 14.

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unattached and unsupported, each canopy separated from the one above it by the space of three feet. The walls of this temple had depicted on them the incidents of Buddha's career as Bodhisattva, including the circumstances of his attaining bodhi and the omens attending his final passing away, all great and small were here delineated. Outside the gate of the monastery, on either side north and south was a stone elephant.<sup>1</sup>

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AFTER centuries of oblivion and neglect, the caves were discovered in the first quarter of the last century, the earliest recorded visitors being some officers of the Madras Army, who saw them in 1819 and named them after the village Ajanta lying at a straight distance of 5 kilometres. The name 'Ajanta' for the caves as well has gained acceptance since then. During the next two decades, other persons, some of them again Army officers, also visited the caves.<sup>2</sup>

THE first scholarly report on the caves was by James Fergusson, who, in a paper read at the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1843, described the rock-cut 'temples' of western India, including those of Ajanta. He placed the Ajanta caves in their architectural and chronological perspective and rightly observed that by virtue of the prolonged time-range of their excavations, they formed 'a sort of a chronometric scale' extremely useful in ascertaining the age of the other cave-series, none of which was as complete as the Ajanta one. He concluded: 'The only series, therefore, that demands immediate attention is that of Ajanta.'<sup>3</sup>

AT the instance of the Royal Asiatic Society, moved by Fergusson's report, the Court of Directors of the East India Company recommended to the Government of India the employment of some talented officers or of other means for getting copies of the paintings not only in the Ajanta but in other caves and preserving the caves from dilapidation.<sup>4</sup> Even after much deliberation, nothing was done towards the latter end, but for the copying of the paintings R. Gill of the Madras Army was appointed, with adequate assistance. Between the years 1849 and 1955 Gill

<sup>1</sup> T. Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India* (London, 1905), II, pages 239-40. Like Hiuen Tsang's descriptions of other Buddhist monuments, this has an element of wonder and the supernatural and exaggeration of dimensions. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that an inscription in Cave 26 of Ajanta says that a monk Achala (A-chê-lo of Hiuen Tsang ?) had a 'rock-dwelling' (cave) made at Ajanta, perhaps Cave 26 itself. The elephants flanking the gates seem to refer to rock-cut elephants which might have flanked the entrance to Cave 26, like that to Cave 16, where two elephants are still extant.

<sup>2</sup> The ancient name of Ajanta is not known, but for a suggestion see below, page 15, note 3. For the writings of some of the early visitors see Bibliography, below, page 60. Professor Walter M. Spink, who has been working on Ajanta for some time, tells the present writer that he has noticed the name of a British officer, with the date 1819, engraved in Cave 10. Evidently the officer was in the party of the first recorded visitors to the caves. Here is indeed 'archaeological evidence' corroborating 'literary sources'. The inscription appears above man-height, indicating that the floor of the cave had been covered with débris at the time of the visit. It seems that all was not well with these early visits. Dry grass was perhaps burnt inside the caves to illuminate the paintings; this must have added to the soot already deposited on the paintings by the fires lit by stray residents in the caves in the past. Dr. Bird, who visited the caves in 1828 under authority and later on made himself useful by copying inscriptions in the west-Indian caves, is said to have peeled off four faces from the 'zodiac' painting (wheel of life, Cave 17, below, page 38). J. Prinsep, 'Facsimiles of Indian inscriptions', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, V (1836), pages 554-61, where an animated description of the caves by Ralph and Gresley, visitors to the caves in 1828, is quoted.

<sup>3</sup> J. Fergusson, 'On the rock-cut temples of India', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, VIII (1846), pages 30-92, particularly 55-60 and 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Ancient India*, number 9 (1953), pages 9-10.

## INTRODUCTION

prepared copies in oil of about thirty paintings.<sup>1</sup> Most of them were destroyed by fire in 1866 in the Indian Court of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham where they had been displayed. Five of Gill's copies which had not been displayed and therefore escaped destruction were sent to the Indian Museum, South Kensington.

\* \* \* \* \*

FOLLOWING the suggestion of James Fergusson, the Government of Bombay asked John Griffiths, Superintendent (later on Principal), Sir Jamshedji Jijibhai School of Art, Bombay, to report on the paintings. Griffiths strongly urged the preparation of records of what remained of the paintings, as a result of which a large number of students of the School were engaged to prepare coloured copies of the paintings under the direction of Griffiths. Griffiths took to his task with great zeal and understanding and made some discerning observations on the paintings, such as can be made only by an artist-copyist who comes to know every part of the copied painting and is, at the same time, emotionally equipped to appreciate it. He also foresaw the impact of Ajanta on the future art in India.<sup>2</sup>

THE work of copying continued from 1872 to 1885, with a break of three years, and was completed at a cost of fifty thousand rupees. Griffiths assures us that not a single copy left the caves 'without my having examined it and carefully compared and corrected it with the original'. But misfortune once more overtook Ajanta copies—in 1885, when many of Griffiths' works were destroyed or damaged by fire in the Indian Museum, South Kensington. Some of the surviving copies were published in two sumptuous volumes in 1896;<sup>3</sup> more than any other previous publication, they drew the attention of the art-historian to the special position of the Ajanta paintings in world-art.

\* \* \* \* \*

IN the meantime the caves were being subjected to a more systematic study than what had been attempted before.<sup>4</sup> In 1871 Fergusson, once again taking the lead, offered to edit the available material on the Ajanta and other caves. He and James Burgess of the Archaeological Survey of India set about the task, the latter undertaking fresh surveys as well. Thus, the architectural details of the caves were scrutinized, their inscriptions were deciphered, providing material for their dating and sometimes their political affiliations, and the subjects

<sup>1</sup> Gill published his stereoscopic photographs in *Rock-temples of Ajanta and Ellora* (1862) and *One Hundred Stereoscopic Illustrations of Architecture and Natural History* (1864). Mrs. Speir reproduced some ten line-drawings from Gill's copies in *Life in Ancient India* (Cornhill, 1856). Some of them were repeated by the same author, later on named Mrs. Manning, in *Ancient and Mediaeval India* (London, 1869).

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, II (1873), pages 152-53; III (1874), pages 25-28; IV (1875), page 253.

<sup>3</sup> J. Griffiths, *The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave-temples of Ajanta, Khandesh, India*, two volumes (London, 1896), with introductory text and with one hundred and fifty-nine plates (nine of them in colour and the rest monochrome) and eighty-eight text-illustrations. It is felt that the colour in the reproductions is somewhat accentuated; restoration of some damaged parts is also not unlikely. Cf. H. Goetz in *Mārg*, 2, number 4, page 36: 'Unfortunately the very damaged condition of many Ajanta paintings often made copying rather a task of reconstruction which could not avoid introducing an element of subjective interpretation, and the first set of copies executed under the superintendence of J. Griffiths had not been free from a certain prettiness then cultivated by the Bombay School of Arts.' It also seems that Griffiths and his party applied varnish over the paintings, below, page 56, note 1.

<sup>4</sup> For the works published during the period see Bibliography, below, page 60.

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of most of the sculptures but only some of the paintings were identified;<sup>1</sup> it was easier to identify Buddha and his life-scenes both in sculpture and in painting than Jātaka-stories.

IN 1895 S. F. Oldenburg creditably identified eight Jātakas in the paintings, solely on the basis of unillustrated descriptions of Burgess (1879).<sup>2</sup> In 1902 H. Lüders, with the help of painted records, identified two scenes, including one already proposed by Oldenburg, with Jātaka-stories as given in the *Jātaka-mālā* of Āryasūra,<sup>3</sup> thus establishing that some texts other than the traditional Pāli Jātakas had been utilized in the rendering of stories at Ajanta.

IN the winter seasons of 1909-10 and 1910-11 Lady Herringham copied some paintings with the assistance of Indian students—Syed Ahmad and Muhammad Fazlud-Din of Hyderabad and Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar and Samarendranath Gupta of the Calcutta School of Art—all of whom were to acquire renown as distinguished artists in their later days, and of Dorothy M. Larcher of England. In 1915 the India Society published fifty-five of them.<sup>4</sup>

PROBABLY for the first time, in 1911, Victor Goloubew took photographs of the paintings. The details of his work are not available, but he published his photographs of paintings of Cave 1 in 1927.<sup>5</sup>

BEFORE 1919, when Alfred Foucher renewed his studies on the Ajanta paintings, about a dozen Jātaka-stories had already been noticed in them, thanks to the efforts of Bhau Daji, Burgess, Oldenburg and Lüders.<sup>6</sup> Foucher's researches succeeded in recognizing a much larger number—not only of the sculptured figures but of painted scenes—so that he could justifiably claim that 'the bulk of the work of interpreting the wall-paintings is two-thirds finished'.<sup>7</sup> After him there have been some stray endeavours for fresh identifications.<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

ALL persons who had visited Ajanta more than once remarked on the progressive deterioration and even destruction of paintings. It was therefore felt necessary to prepare faithful copies of the paintings once more, and with this end in view the Archaeological Department

<sup>1</sup> In addition, Fergusson identified a painting in Cave 1 with the fanciful event of an ambassador of the Persian king Khusrau II presenting himself to the court of the Deccan ruler Pulakeśin II of the Chālukya dynasty (A. D. 610-11 to 642), 'On the identification of Chosroes II among the paintings of Ajanta', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, New Series, XI (1879), pages 155-70. The identification was shown to be wrong long ago, but, so catching it is that it has been repeated even in some recent works. Rajendralala Mitra wrote, also ineffectively, on this and other scenes with foreigners, 'On representation of foreigners in the Ajanta frescoes', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, XLVII (1878), part I, pages 62-72.

<sup>2</sup> S. F. Oldenburg (translated) in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, XVIII (1897), pages 195-96.

<sup>3</sup> H. Lüders (translated) in *Indian Antiquary*, XXXII (1903), pages 326-29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ajanta Frescoes* (Oxford, 1915). The text consists of introductory essays by some members of the India Society. The portfolio contains seventeen reproductions in colour and the rest, forty, in monochrome, made into forty-two plates. It was admittedly thought 'advisable, for the sake of the beauty of the composition and of intelligibility, to fill up the small holes' in the paintings. The present writer is inclined to the view that the reproductions are insipid and mostly lack the feel of the Ajanta style.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Goloubew, 'Documents pour servir à l'étude d'Ajanta, les peintures de la première grotto', *Ars Asiatica*, X (Paris and Brussels, 1927), with seventy-one monochrome plates and an explanatory text.

<sup>6</sup> See Bibliography, below, page 60.

<sup>7</sup> A. Foucher, 'Preliminary report on the interpretation of the paintings and sculptures of Ajanta' (translated), *Journal of the Hyderabad Archaeological Society for 1919-20* (1921), pages 50-111.

<sup>8</sup> For example, G. Yazdani in *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology*, VII (Leyden, 1932), pages 31-32; M. G. Dikshit in *Transactions of the Indian History Congress, Fifth (Hyderabad) Session*, 1941, pages 567-68; D. Mitra, *Ajanta*, third edition (New Delhi, 1964), pages 18, 26, 27 and 53. M. N. Deshpande has proposed a new identification for a Buddha-scene in sculpture, below, page 29.

## INTRODUCTION

of Hyderabad State appointed, in 1915, Syed Ahmad, an associate of Lady Herringham (above, page 4) to copy the paintings with 'greater fidelity to the originals'. Syed Ahmad engaged himself in the work with assiduity for many years.<sup>1</sup> Almost simultaneously the same Department also considered a proposal of reproducing the paintings by the process of colour-photography. However, as a prerequisite to that, it was considered necessary to remove the crust over the paintings formed by dust, dirt and coats of varnish indiscriminately applied in earlier days. To do this two Italian *restaurateurs* were invited and they worked on the paintings during two seasons (1920-21 and 1921-22).<sup>2</sup>

**THEREAFTER**, E. L. Vassey, at the invitation of the Hyderabad Government, spent five months at Ajanta, photographing nearly all the paintings in the caves. Vassey's negatives form the basis of excellent portfolios produced by Yazdani,<sup>3</sup> which remain the standard work on the subject.

**IN** 1949 the Hyderabad Government appointed a committee to go into the question of the preservation and maintenance of the Ajanta and Ellora caves, with Dr. Ghulam Yazdani as the president. The committee examined the problem in some detail and made a few valuable recommendations on the structural preservation of the caves.

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**IN** 1951 Parliament of India declared the caves of Ajanta, along with a large number of other monuments in the former Princely States, as monuments of national importance, and two years later the Archaeological Survey of India took direct charge of the caves. Since then the Survey has been tending them with care and diligence. While the recommendations of the Yazdani Committee have been found to be of some use, a major innovation has been the introduction of mass-concrete, with reinforcement where necessary, for the replacement of worn-out portions of the rock and pillars of ashlar-masonry erected in the past to support overhanging rocks and for similar purposes. The advantage of mass-concrete over masonry in rock-architecture is obvious: while masonry is inconsistent with the rock-mass and produces a jarring effect, suitably-tinted concrete simulates the rock and merges with it. Side by side, extensive chemical treatment and preservation of the paintings have been taken in hand; these measures have been detailed below (pages 57 to 59).

**MINDFUL** of its responsibilities towards the paintings and of their supreme value, the Archaeological Survey of India also initiated, in 1956-57, a scheme of preparing their faithful copies—

<sup>1</sup> Many of the copies prepared by Syed Ahmad were for a fairly long time displayed in the Ajanta Pavilion, Public Gardens, Hyderabad. But the latest (July 1966) information is that along with all other paintings exhibited in the Pavilion they have been now dismantled.

<sup>2</sup> Their task and methods and the effects of their work have been detailed below, page 56.

<sup>3</sup> G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, four parts (Oxford, 1930, 1933, 1946 and 1955), each part having a text-volume and a portfolio. There are seventy-seven plates in colour, fifty-five plates with outlines in red and two hundred and seventy-three monochrome ones. In some cases, where photographs were unsatisfactory, Syed Ahmad's copies were utilized for reproduction. Most of the colour-plates have an overtone of yellow, the effect of the coat of varnish and shellac—a shortcoming which is bound to be repeated in all photographic reproductions (including those in the present Album). There are also some obvious variations in colour. For example, the colour of the begging-bowl of Buddha in the famous 'mother-and-child' scene, IV, text, page 70, and plate XLI, is described and shown as bright jade-green, whereas the real colour on the wall is dull yellowish-green, as can be seen in this Album, plate LXXVI, and in Syed Ahmad's copy in the Ajanta Pavilion.

## AJANTA MURALS

a project all the more imperative as the copies of Gill and the party of Griffiths had been largely destroyed, as those of Lady Herringham (to judge from their reproductions) had left something to be desired and as the Hyderabad artists had confined their activities mostly to the copying of only parts of scenes or individual figures that appealed to them. The idea of the project has been to copy complete scenes in their entirety, with all their artistry and blemishes caused by damage: there should be no subjective discrimination among the good, indifferent and bad. The work is in progress, and sixteen completed copies have been made over to the National Museum, New Delhi, for display.

IN 1954 an album of reproductions of the paintings, presumably based on photographs taken by himself, was produced by Madanjeet Singh.<sup>1</sup> Under an agreement between the Government of India and UNESCO, David L. De Harport came to India early in 1955 to photograph the paintings and during his six-month stay prepared, with the assistance of two photographers of the Archaeological Survey of India, two sets of transparencies, each of five hundred and eighty items. In accordance with the terms of the agreement one set was deposited with the Archaeological Survey and the other with UNESCO, some items of whose set have been utilized in a small UNESCO publication.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Harport prepared six hundred and seventeen black-and-white negatives, now with the Archaeological Survey, augmenting the collection built up by the Survey itself. Twenty out of Harport's transparencies available in India were utilized in 1956 in an album brought out jointly by the Survey and the Lalit Kala Akademi (Indian Academy of Fine Arts).<sup>3</sup> The latest publication on Ajanta and its paintings, except the present Album, is a second work by Madanjeet Singh, with an extensive text.<sup>4</sup>

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ALL the photographs reproduced here belong to and have been produced by the Archaeological Survey of India. They were taken directly from the originals except one (plate I, Cave 10), which is too indistinct on the wall and had to be photographed from a copy: the Album would have remained incomplete without this earliest painting of Ajanta.

FOR the reproduction of the eighty-five plates in colour, colour-negatives were prepared, and prints in colour were taken out of them and utilized in block-making. The fidelity of the colour on the proofs of the blocks was checked more than once, and no pains have been spared to bring out the true colour, within unavoidable limitations.

CIRCUMSTANCES at Ajanta do not make it possible to take photographs of large scenes. In the first place, the space available between the painted wall-surface and the camera is too narrow to cover large areas, particularly in colour. Secondly, the colour on the surface, shiny with shellac under artificial light, reacts differently from place to place according to its distance

<sup>1</sup> *India—Paintings from Ajanta Caves* (New York Graphic Society, by arrangement with UNESCO, 1954), with a short introduction by Madanjeet Singh, with one monochrome and thirty-two colour-plates.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ajanta Caves* (Mentor-UNESCO Art Book, New York, 1963), with introduction by Benjamin Rowland and with twenty-eight reproductions in colour.

<sup>3</sup> *Ajanta Paintings* (New Delhi, 1956), with twenty plates in colour.

<sup>4</sup> Madanjeet Singh, *The Cave Paintings of Ajanta* (London, 1965), with text, eighty-two plates, mostly in colour, and twenty-two line-drawings.



## INTRODUCTION

from the camera and the light-source, to the intensity of the light and to the period of the exposure. We had therefore mostly to be contented with individual figures or groups of them, adding at the end of the Album twenty line-drawings, figs. 1 to 20, reproduced in offset, to give an idea of the composition of the paintings and their stories, with the areas illustrated on the respective plates marked in outlines. The line-drawings themselves were prepared by the drawing of lines in India ink on the outlines of figures and other details of the paintings on enlarged black-and-white photographic prints of the paintings and thereafter by the washing off of all emulsion from the prints; thus only the inked outlines remained. The surviving lines were not checked with the paintings, so that minor variations, which must be negligible, are not ruled out. In spite of variations, if any, they will definitely serve their purpose. The twenty black-and-white plates, A to R, are intended to illustrate the sculpture of Ajanta.

**THE** plates in colour, I to LXXXV, are generally arranged according to the caves, the order being: Caves 10 (plates I and LXXXV), 6 (plate II), 16 (plate III), 1 (plates IV to XLI and LXXXIV), 2 (XLII to LVI) and 17 (LVII to LXXXIII). Within a particular cave the sequence broadly follows the place in the cave where the painting occurs.

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**TIME** was when the Ajanta paintings were frequently compared with other paintings—Chinese, Early Renaissance and so on, according to individual training and inclination—to establish their superiority or indicate their deficiency and were even dismissed as hardly to be classed among the fine arts, because they were more decorative than pictorial.<sup>1</sup> No less speculative were the theories about the origin of the art.<sup>2</sup> It is now realized that the Ajanta art, born and nurtured on the indigenous soil and inspired by an indigenous religion, has a claim to be judged in its own right and its appreciation need not rise and fall by external comparisons. Such an appreciation is sure to be promoted by publications on the murals such as are already available and the present Album.

<sup>1</sup> George Watt, *Indian Art in Delhi*, 1903 (Calcutta, 1904), page 454.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, on the basis of the fanciful identification of the 'Persian' scene (above, page 4, note 1), Vincent A. Smith observed: it 'also suggests the possibility that the Ajanta school of pictorial art may have been derived from Persia and ultimately from Greece,' *Early History of India*, fourth edition (1924), page 442.

## AJANTA : AN ARTISTIC APPRECIATION

**T**HE LOCAL people call them *rañgīt leñī*, caves coloured; to us they are the rock-hewn caves of Ajanta. Caves are to be found all over India, many of them scattered about in the mountains at a near distance from Ajanta itself. Those caves may have beautiful sculpture, but we only see a few traces of the paintings with which they were once covered. One marvels at Ajanta how the ageless artist of yore knew to wring colour out of the very ground upon which he walked—colour for the purpose of embellishing the barren skin of the stone. Ajanta! the name itself is pregnant:  
Spectrum in the lap of darkness.

AJANTA is one of the oldest monasteries of India and of the world. This magnificent carving, the Buddhist place of meditation and worship, lies all alone in the midst of nature representing man's victory. Needing to project faith into lasting material, he chose the solid rock. The moulding of stones under his fingers to become children of his dreams and caves—the space within whose bounds to concentrate and realize Truth—affirms a most powerful vision of all mankind:

The portrait of faith.

STANDING on the top of the mountain opposite the caves, all one sees is mountain-ranges—one behind the other, lying like waves in the open sea. One has to go down the ravine where the little river flows, then face the rock. Lifting one's eyes one sees the soft curve drawing the line between the end of the mountain and the beginning of the sky, stitched together by small bushes piercing into the blue air. Unmoved by day or by night or influences extraneous, the two elements are locked with each other as in an eternal divine embrace:  
Conception of the caves.

THE caves themselves are the result. The divine play took its form in art, guiding man to follow the beat, giving him the strength to do and an insight that he might know how to do. Today the echo of that music is still heard mingled with vibrations from all that exists therein, from sculptured stones and painted walls, from the broadest to the minutest details. Also unheard voices—whispers of patches eaten up by time—paints worn off, little by little, year after year:

Meditating patches.

URGE for self-realization made man go in search for a retreat from the world. He found the mountain responsive and hammered on its stone to create for himself an entrance into the immobile rock. Here, being in seclusion, he absorbed the philosophy of Buddhism and saw it as if it were alive. He learnt to love truth—and this love grew upon his soul. To this surrendering worship he invited all mankind. Believing in his faith he sat meditating, then began painting, recreating the world he had left behind, fused with the vision he aspired after—the Middle Path:

Humanism in abstraction.

## AJANTA : AN ARTISTIC APPRECIATION

**THE** caves lie like a string of pearls round the waist of the mountain. To those who have seen with their own eyes and fought their way—eyes wide open—away from the heat and the sun and bright light to the cool calmness of the caves,—to those the mountain has given more than they expected, and so much more than what could be taken. It helps little then to analyse, better to rest the mind in childlike wonder. Wonder, an expression by which the divine play of creation reveals itself and echoes in the vast realms of our little-known selves: Mystery, the greatest inspirer.

**HERE** man need not kneel in vain. Almost all the caves are loaded with the same multiple call—architecture, sculpture, painting—slowly making their appearances through the faint light of a lamp or the still fainter light of a far-away day. Things fall into shape as the eye advances, repetitions of the same presented in different manifestations, reminding us again of the appraisal of life. It lies embedded in those who bow to the Master of life, Buddha. Even space and the stone itself, the forms, the lines and the colour which created his image are the same as created the people, the flowers and the animals. We are finding it omnipresent: The mirage of Kindly Light.

**PEACE** exists in the caves—a prevailing peace of harmony in composition and colour. Still in a clasp it holds the proud contradictions, all artistic expressions co-exist, each in its strongest potentialities and none at the cost of the other. Each little section holds in its design and colour an equal amount of stillness and movement. Within the composition continues the dialogue, thriving while in tension—life in suspension giving vibration to the surface. The outcome has been secretly imprisoned in the walls, yet liberated: Catharsis for the restless soul.

**BEING** the most exquisite of murals to be seen in India they were once garlanding even the sun-baked façades of the caves, now peeled off. Hidden inside are the paintings, clinging to the walls as does man to life, and the people of the scenes destined to be there—a meaningful crowd, each telling the story of man's cravings, each alone representing life. They are masters of their kinds, yet devotees to one beyond them all, Buddha: The Enlightened One.

**THE** characters in the murals, with eye-brows arched and eyes half-open, half-closed, minds sweeping through their eyes as birds in flight—some sideways, some straight, others inward—yet communicating with space, catch our sight, taking us to a destiny unknown, to the homeland of our dreams. Facing the unyielding walls we are invited to look on but are frowned upon if we want to look through. A reflection of the beauty that is far away: The broken mirror alive.

**FORMS** and colours find an excuse for their existence by becoming figures and things from the worlds we know, configuring themselves into scenes running across the wall, to the next and the next, to the pillars and posts, finally spreading over the ceiling. One's thoughts are halted before they are born, while the feeling eye is projected into a new world. Our own spare-time concept surrenders, again to be thrown into a limitless expanse: Extension of self.

## AJANTA MURALS

THIS is a very special way of seeing—fulfilment of a vision. Then comes the weariness of seeing followed by acceptance. The scenes without a beginning and an end to that beginning, once seen ever engraved, are painful because of their perfection, and all the more rewarding, having been so longed for during our lives. This unexpected confrontation leaves us nakedly unreserved, taking us in amazement and yet leaving us struck at the insight:  
A step towards self-realization.

RELIGION is alive in the caves, making man remember things he thought he did not know—men and women living in harmony, keeping to their places, moral values set in pictorial relief. Buddhist philosophy in the beginning said 'no' to metaphysical speculations, said 'yes' to all that has a germ of life and later grew into another variation, Mahāyānism, giving unending scope to man's fertile inventiveness by allowing inbreeding of imagery. The artist meditated over the blankness of the walls and then put life into his creation—people to become heroes and heroines of his life-intoxicated soulscape:  
Memory idealized.

THE woman of Ajanta—among men she is always the queen, herself at her best, helped by the lines. The lines search for volumes to embrace, caress her contours, underline her grace. Appearing again and again, whether walking or standing, sitting or reclining, hers is the image of beauty in repose—arrested activity, floating lines at ease knitting her into the texture of nature in growth. She becomes the metaphor of life, intertwined with flowers and creepers, parts of the same image:  
Messengers of restless peace.

OVER seven hundred years of innumerable hours heard the striking of chisels, the murmur of prayers, and saw the pilgrimage of the brushes on the walls before the caves came to be what they are. Sculpture and painting grew simultaneously closer, lending their essentials to each other. This sameness of expression was the outcome of paint being used on the finished sculptures and the murals taking up lines of the kind which possesses forms within their enclosures. Today only parts of the paintings of the walls remain—the colour on the sculptures has almost vanished. How did they look in their original newness?  
Painted sculptures and sculptured paintings.

THE painter is as if praying with his brush on the walls. Each line and each colour become a stroke of faith. Faith is the source of all his consciousness, not alone in salutation to the past, but from consciousness born without the past or the future—child of the vast emptiness itself, the *nirvāṇa*! The artist infuses his love for life on the walls; with the Buddhist scripture in his mind and faith in his heart he goes far beyond the letter of the word, his becomes a complete surrender. Depicting beautified people who are in the world—yet not of the world—he paints with equal ease the symbol of renunciation of life. Standing at the gate of *nirvāṇa* itself he paints the climax—the Bodhisattva, the being who does not live for self but for the enlightenment of others and his own:  
*Nirvāṇa* still unattained.

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## AJANTA : AN ARTISTIC APPRECIATION

**IMPOSSIBLE:** it is beyond man's power to take in all at once even when witnessing the scene. It took the artist centuries to create, it takes time to be absorbed. Climbing the stony stairs, step by step, one is farther removed from the green valley. As one draws nearer the abode one's anticipation heightens, the glen lying still—but far below. Strewn ahead are some thirty caves, each set apart, dependent on a will outside the grip of man. The trap-rock itself is moody material—at places hard as flint, at places soft and weak—resulting in some caves to remain unfinished or the finished ones to be half-ruined by the wear of ages:

Monuments dilapidated.

**THE** Ajanta style of painting is unique, a poetic dynamism set in motion. Behind all lay not alone the impassioned zeal of the artist but also the unbounded enthusiasm of pious kings. Kings and kingdoms with their failings and achievements have walked into history, but we know little of the artist—from where he came, if he did come, and then went away, or if he lived and died on the spot. The paintings are his only signature, beyond that he is silent. Were there at a time many painters or a few, had each cave its master-artist, what company of artisans had he with him? We do not know. The master's touch is there, in the tender drawing and paint of the eyes, mouths and fingers. He created a style, with his few lines and brush-strokes made a person speak his entire character. Mannerism had to follow when his helpers repeated the particularities of the master:

Ajantaism became unavoidable.

**TO** this place of worship came many pilgrims during the years. Among them were also artists who carried their impressions back to their own lands. The impact Ajanta had on them can be seen in caves, monasteries and paintings spread all over Ceylon, Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, China and even distant Japan. The Ajanta style of painting gave birth to new openings in the hands of foreigners who came to share the same faith. As a prelude to mural paintings in the whole of south-east and east Asia it remained the parent both in technique and content. With inspiration from Ajanta, painting became the visual vehicle, sometimes carrying mainly itself as also Buddhism—but more often carrying both to far-away places: Great art is contagious.

**IN** the present Album we see the paintings of Ajanta torn from their context. Our loss is not only in the mood-shaping environment of nature, the feel of the foot as it touches the stone, the song of the birds and the smell of the sun-baked greenery around, but also in the unfolding of the caves themselves. Here in the plates we cannot see the engaging play of light descending on the paintings at different hours of the day. We can therefore never comprehend what unspeakable beauty a stroke of sun-ray brings to a meditating Buddha, or with what mild tenderness a face is bathed in the tired light of a dying day. Nor can we perceive the correlation between the spacing in the caves, the placing of sculptures together with the display of the giant paintings on the walls. We must altogether miss the grandeur of the scale wherein a tiny human being is placed next to an enormous Buddha. Here the relationship of proportions is relative, not based on empiric knowledge but dependent on emotional importance, spiritual reality—each different situation demanding a new evaluation. Reproductions may often be faithful, but they will always fail to render the spontaneous freshness of colours and the mellowed texture of age. How can that particular aroma of the walls, the experiences

## AJANTA MURALS

the caves have gone through, ever be transmitted on paper? As long as the Ajanta paintings remain they will be alive, but while it was the order of the cultures of the past to create, today we only attempt at reproduction:

Reproduction a democratic compromise.

SURGERY on the Ajanta walls has given them a second nature. While taking sectional details we are now compelled to see the paintings in bits, plate by plate, instead of in their sequential composition. Interrupting the fluency of lines and colours into arbitrarily-chosen frames of pages, we have severed their meaningful linkage, their subtle spatial reference not only with the complete panels but also with the panoramic view of the entire caves. One of the mysteries about the paintings was their power to captivate the eye and hold it on to the wall, yet not allowing it to rest still at a spot but multiplying the focal points along with the continuous moving lines. The rhythm of composition was carried alternatively by lines and colours, the two playing a repetitive game of vanishing away only to re-appear in a different context. While one stands in front of the wall one experiences an exhausting simultaneity of seeing, shifting eyes from smaller details to complex and larger expanse—back again to everything at once and in flashes. Like collective living, these are collective paintings where no area has been left alone, each depending on the other and partaking of the whole. Not one painting stands isolated. The wonder is, each plate we look at, though the detail of a larger composition, becomes a perfect painting in its own right. The secret of composition in the Ajanta paintings is the principle of breeding proportion within proportions: The basic construction reconstructing itself.

THE paintings once covered the whole surface of the walls—from the edge of the ceiling down to the floor—while now often only the middle portion remains. At times the composition was drawn horizontally up in three parallel running panels, or occasionally vertically, taking the whole space but never allowing blankness to creep in. Was it a *horror vacui* which led them to overcome that horror, thus consciously projecting in reverses, or was it a reflection of their natural ecstasies? The panels are ever giving way to more people, people entering from space behind the walls, clustering together, even then seemingly not intruding upon each other's movements. They are drawn with broad generalizations, at the same time with surprising details. Jewelry has been applied in excess serving a double purpose: to acknowledge the status of a person, as much as to apportion space in form: Studied hierarchy all over.

WITH only six pigments in his hand, the Ajanta artist created the vocabulary of the entire colour-range, each speaking its own language and giving meaning to others. Far from dramatizing by climaxing colour-contrasts he took recourse to the more refined expression of tonalities. While the prostrating line often drawn in Indian red would heighten the spirit of the pigments in the divided areas, each colour becomes a symbol, a note in itself, in combination creative of melody existing independently of the story-telling theme. The walls are drenched in colour, brimming in a way so as to give the impression of being the natural sweatings of the stone—so intimately do the paints belong to the murals and the murals to the walls, as if they were wedded together from the very beginning of their beings. Illustrating the Jātaka-stories and other Buddhist themes, they have escaped the

## AJANTA : AN ARTISTIC APPRECIATION

dangerous fallacy of becoming mere painted drawings. They are songs of history, only their poetry is of pure painting—intangible and self-contained like religion, defying to be rendered into another medium:

Words their worst enemy.

**THIS** Album contains only a selection of the best-preserved panels. There are others in the caves, thousands of them, making it apparent that the paintings have not remained unmoved by the changing times. They have developed on their own, as if they were living organisms. Exposed to the wear of ages, they in turn responded with an animated sensitivity. The gradual peeling off of the paint has uncovered the textures and colours below—that of the plaster, mud and rock. The unfolding puzzle of the mastery of their technique together with others less distinguishable, now combined with a totality of effects, may, to an onlooker, appear like the archetypes of modern abstract painting. The breaking up of the surface into disjointed forms and the assembly of different textures make a matrix which brings them nearer to the contemporary temper. The Ajanta paintings of the Golden Age have themselves not escaped the Wheel of the Law, their last incarnation shows us specimens of abstract classicism:

Civilization confirms its cycle.

**WE** humbly recognize what enormous power of pursuit these ancient people possessed, who had the courage to assault the very body of the rock—to overcome the resistance of the stone—and then, with infinite patience, go through the preparatory stages before the alien material was ready to accept their offerings. They illuminated the dark enclaves with their idea and imagination—using the whole world as a memorized model. As if this was not enough, they transferred their substance with the spectacular symbology of Buddhist concepts. The atmosphere inside the caves was charged with spiritual resonance. The constant use of the chanting of prayers by thousands of people, through hundreds of years, and the awe-inspiring unity of all the existing artistic expressions have given them their sanctity. Only a grain of these has survived the present mechanized process of colour-reproduction; but even that one grain is enough to show that Ajanta belongs to the wonders of the world:

Art a symphony to the unattainable.

## THE CAVES : THEIR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE SITUATION of the monastic establishment of Ajanta is significant in more than one way. It is about 130 kilometres north of Paithan (ancient Pratihthāna), the capital of the early Sātavāhanas, and lies off one of the ancient arterial trade-routes connecting north India, through Ujjain and Māhishmatī, with Pratihthāna in Dakṣiṇāpatha and farther with ports on the south-eastern coast, through Ter (ancient Tagara), Kondapur, Amaravati (ancient Dhānyakaṭaka), Guntapalli, etc. The identification of Bhogavardhana mentioned in Sanchi inscriptions<sup>1</sup> with Bhokardan, District Aurangabad, half way between Ajanta and Pratihthāna, and the existence of an ancient habitation-mound there<sup>2</sup> convincingly indicate the alignment of the route. Ajanta also lies near another trade-route connecting Broach (ancient Bharukachchha, Barygaza of the *Periplus*<sup>3</sup> and Po-lu-ka-che-p'ō of Hiuen Tsang<sup>4</sup>) with Pratihthāna, through ancient townships like Prakash, District Dhulia, and Bahal, District Jalgaon, recently brought to light by excavations. The Satmala range separating the plains of Khandesh, formed by the Tapti and its tributaries, from the tableland of Maharashtra is pierced by a pass not far from Ajanta. The serene grandeur of nature is at once in evidence at Ajanta, and the words of the Upanishadic seer<sup>5</sup> that an ideal place for the contemplation of the Divine is a hidden cave protected from wind, situated in surroundings made favourable to the mind by the sound of water and other features and not offensive to the eye are borne out by the selection of this site. The stream Waghora rushing down from the highlands takes seven leaps at the head of the semicircular end of the gorge: the resultant waterfalls and pools of water (Sat-kund) as also the melody of running water add to the charm of the place. In an inscription in Cave 26 the valley is described as resonant with the chirping of birds and chattering of monkeys and the monastery as inhabited by great *yogins*.<sup>6</sup> In another inscription, in Cave 16, is described the majesty of this 'best of mountains on which hang multitudes of water-laden clouds' during the rainy season,<sup>7</sup> when the monks occupied the monastery.

THE habitation that came into existence with the commencement of the excavation of the caves lies less than a kilometre upstream and is known even now as Lenapur ('cave-town'). The very significant name of the place, the find of Sātavāhana pottery there and the existence of a rock-cut path from the caves to the place suggest its contemporaneity with the early caves at Ajanta. It may further be pointed out that Basim (ancient Vatsagulma), District Ākola, only 130 kilometres to the north-east of Ajanta, was the capital of a branch of Vākāṭaka rulers, a minister and a subordinate vassal of whom were responsible for the excavation of

<sup>1</sup> H. Lüders, 'A list of Brāhmī inscriptions', *Epigraphia Indica*, X (1912), numbers 266, 295 and 296.

<sup>2</sup> *Ancient India*, number 15 (1959), page 69.

<sup>3</sup> *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, edited by W. H. Schoff (New York, 1912), pages 39 etc.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India* (London, 1905), II, page 241.

<sup>5</sup> *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad*, II, 10, *śabda-jal-āśray-ādibhiḥ mano'nu-kūle na tu chakshu-pīḍane guhā-nivāt-āśrayaṇe prayojayet*, *The Principal Upanishads*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan (London, 1953), page 721.

<sup>6</sup> Yazdani, *Ajanta*, IV (Oxford, 1955), text, pages 116 and 118.

<sup>7</sup> V. V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, V (Ootacamund, 1963), pages 109 and 111. Elsewhere in the same inscription, the mountain is described as 'clothed in the brilliance of Indra's crown' and the crowding clouds are likened to the multitude of the hoods of serpents.



## THE CAVES : THEIR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Caves 16 and 17 (below, page 16 ) and, for that matter, for the revival of artistic activity at Ajanta.

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WE have necessarily to take a wide perspective to appreciate the development of cave-architecture at Ajanta and to understand the circumstances which led to the emergence of this new form of artistic endeavour in the two centuries before the Christian era. The spread of Buddhism in western India was due to Aśoka (273-36 B.C.), who sent a religious emissary, by name (Yavana) Dharmarakshita, to Aparānta, the northern part of the western coast. He started his activities from Śūrpāraka (Sopara, District Thana), a flourishing port-town and the find-spot of the edicts of Aśoka. Perhaps taking a cue from what Aśoka and his grandson had attempted in the quartzose gneissic rock of the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills in south Bihar, the Buddhist monks might have felt that west India was ideally suited for a similar purpose. The perpendicular cliffs of the amagdaloidal trap-formation of the Sahyādri<sup>1</sup> with horizontal beddings provided a hospitable place and a convenient medium for the excavation of monasteries and prayer-halls, and out of a desire to create something more enduring and monumental than ordinary buildings they zestfully exploited this medium.<sup>2</sup> Out of some twelve hundred rock-cut excavations in India, about eight hundred are situated in west India.

THE earliest caves in the Deccan belong to the Hīnayāna faith and were excavated in the wake of the spread of Buddhism in the two centuries before and after the Christian era. Their beginning coincides with the rise of the Sātavāhanas who had their capital at Pratiṣṭhāna. Though these rulers professed Brāhmaṇism, they were tolerant towards Buddhism. But their greatest contribution lay in bringing political stability to the Deccan and in the promotion of trade and commerce within the land and with the Mediterranean world, which brought in enormous riches.

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THE earliest inscriptions of Ajanta<sup>3</sup> do not furnish any information save that the façade of the oldest *chaitya-griha*,<sup>4</sup> Cave 10, was the gift of one Kaṭahādi, son of a Vāsiṭhī, and that the

<sup>1</sup> An inscription in Cave 17 says that a monolithic (*ek-āsmaka*) *maṇḍapa* containing the image of Buddha was excavated on the spur of the Sahya (Western Ghats), V. V. Mirashi, *Vākāṭaka Inscriptions*, page 129. Mirashi thinks that Sahya-pāda refers to the Ajanta hill.

<sup>2</sup> An inscription in Cave 26 aptly tells us that one should set up monuments on mountains that will endure as long as the moon and the sun continue, for a man would exist to enjoy paradise as long as his memory is green on earth, G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, IV, text, pages 115 and 117-18. The same inscription calls the cave a *śaila-griha* ('rock-dwelling'), corresponding to *sela-ghara* of a Karla cave-inscription, Lüders, 'A list of Brāhmī inscriptions', number 1087.

<sup>3</sup> No inscription or any other source reveals the ancient name of Ajanta, but it may be hazarded that it was Ajitañjaya, a place mentioned in the *Mahāmāyūri*, with the *yaksha* Kūṭa-damśhṭra ('one with peak-like teeth') as its patron. The localities mentioned in the text before and after Ajitañjaya may indicate that it has to be looked for in north India, but it must be remembered that the text does not always follow a geographical order. As already stated (above, page 2), the caves have obtained their present name of Ajanta from that of a neighbouring village, the usual local pronunciation of which is *Ajinṭhā*. This brings the words *Ajitañjaya* and *Ajanta* nearer each other. One wonders if the full ancient name was Ajitañjaya-sthāna, from which the word *Ajinṭhā* is an easy derivative. Ajita is the lay name of Maitreya or the Future Buddha, G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, I (London, 1937), page 37. For the text of the *Mahāmāyūri*, see V. S. Agrawala in *Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society*, XV, part ii (1942), pages 27 and 35.

<sup>4</sup> In the terminology of Buddhist cave-architecture, and elsewhere too, a *chaitya-griha*, sometimes called simply *chaitya*, is a prayer-hall, apsidal on plan, with a nave and side-aisles marked out from each other by a row

## AJANTA MURALS

*vihāra*, Cave 12—a *thānaka* (shrine) with *uvarakas* (cells) and an *upāsaya*—was the gift of a merchant Ghanāmadaḍa. The latter is one of earliest inscriptions in western India recording the patronage of Buddhism by a merchant.

AJANTA began to hum with renewed activity after an interval of six hundred years or so, when ambitious excavations were planned to encompass the entire crescentic valley in order to meet the changing and growing needs of the faith: the construction of a temple of Buddha was then regarded as a means of attaining salvation.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, two magnificent *chaitya-grīhas*, Caves 19 and 26 (the third one, Cave 29, was left unfinished), and commodious *vihāras*, Caves 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, 17 and 20 to 24, each almost invariably with a shrine for Buddha, and some with cells for *yakshas* and niches for Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, came to be excavated. Almost all the excavations of this period were completed in the fifth and sixth centuries under the patronage of the Vākāṭaka rulers, who, like the Sātavāhanas, were themselves Brāhmaṇists but actively allowed Buddhism to flourish in their territory. The Ajanta and Ghatotkacha cave-inscriptions attest to the liberality of the ministers of a branch of the Vākāṭaka rulers settled at Vatsagulma.<sup>2</sup> An inscription in Cave 16 at Ajanta records the dedication of a dwelling 'which was fully adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture-galleries, ledges, statues of the nymphs of Indra and the like and was ornamented with beautiful pillars and stairs and had a temple of Buddha inside' by one Varāhadeva, the minister of the last of the Vākāṭaka rulers Harisheṇa of about 475-500.<sup>3</sup> Another inscription, in Cave 17, tells us of a chief of a family subordinate to Harisheṇa and describes how under his patronage was excavated a gem-like monolithic *maṇḍapa*, Cave 17 itself, with a shrine for Buddha and an adjacent water-reservoir and a *gandha-kuṭī* to the west.<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, the chief is credited with having liberally contributed towards the construction of *stūpas* and *vihāras* in the land.

THE interesting observations on Ajanta by Hiuen Tsang have already been quoted (above, page 1). They show that even though the prolific activity at this monastic centre had come to a close by the end of the sixth century, the caves continued to be popular in the Buddhist world even later on. The last old record at Ajanta is an inscription on the back wall of the shrine between Caves 26 and 27; it belongs to the period of the Rāshtrakūṭas of the eighth or ninth century. As its Buddhist character is doubtful, it may indicate that by then the Ajanta caves had been deserted by the Buddhists.

of pillars, and a *stūpa* (often called *chaitya*, which is a comprehensive name for any sacred object) at the remote end of the nave. A *saṅghārāma*, often called *vihāra*, is a monastic abode and has as its nucleus a central hall with flanking residential cells, but the latter term generally refers to a complete monastic establishment. At Ajanta, the distribution is as follows. Early (Hīnayāna-Sātavāhana) phase (second and first centuries B.C.): Caves 9 and 10—*chaitya-grīhas*; Caves 8, 12, 13 and 15 A—*vihāras* (*saṅghārāmas*). Late (Mahāyāna-Vākāṭaka) phase (fifth and sixth centuries A.D.): Caves 19, 26 and 29—*chaitya-grīhas*; Caves 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, 17 and 20 to 24—*vihāras*. The rest are incomplete or nondescript or are ancillary to the adjacent larger caves. In addition, there are shallow caves like niches to contain images of individual deities. Many of the caves were approached from the streamside by individual flights of rock-cut steps. The present pathway running in front of the caves has no relevance to the ancient arrangement.

<sup>1</sup> G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, IV, pages 116 and 118.

<sup>2</sup> V. V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, pages 103-29.

<sup>3</sup> V. V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, pages 109 and 111. The cave is also said to have contained a shrine of *nāga-rāja* (*nāg-endra-veśma*), evidently referring to the porch-shrine with a sculpture of *nāga-rāja*.

<sup>4</sup> V. V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, pages 127 and 129. The reservoir is believed to be the one adjoining Cave 17 and the *gandha-kuṭī*, 'perfumed chamber', the residence of Buddha, to be the *chaitya*, Cave 19.

## THE CAVES : THEIR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

WHY Ajanta declined and was abandoned we do not know. Perhaps the trade-route on which lay Ajanta and Bhogavardhana was deserted. This surmise gains support when we notice that there was an alternative route, not far away, from north India to Pratiṣṭhāna, which in all probability passed along Patna<sup>1</sup> near Chalisgaon through an old pass known later on as Gavatal-ghat or Amba<sup>2</sup> and, bypassing Pitalkhora, proceeded towards Ellora (ancient Elāpura) and thence to Pratiṣṭhāna, thereafter following the usual route to the southern trading-centres. Ellora, as we know, was at the height of its glory from the seventh to the tenth centuries, when the Rāmeśvara (Cave 21), the great Kailāsa (Cave 16) and other Brāhmaṇical caves were being excavated and Buddhism was being ousted by Brāhmaṇism.

BUT before this repository of the magnificent achievement of the Indian people in the cognate arts of rock-architecture, sculpture and painting fell into oblivion, it had done its part in spreading its message of art far beyond its confines. If Buddhism could be credited with having imparted religious education to large parts of Asia, Ajanta must be regarded as the fountain-head of inspiration in so far as the art of mural painting is concerned. The influence of Ajanta is patent on the paintings of Ceylon:<sup>3</sup> the celestial damsels at Sigiria are almost duplicates of those at Ajanta in the matter of technique, colour and subjects. The cave-paintings at Bamiyan in Afghanistan and those in the Central Asian monasteries along the ancient silk-route through Khotan, Miran including Tun-huang and Turfan—all bear testimony to the effect of the Ajanta tradition in one way or the other.<sup>4</sup> The very idea of excavating a cave in rock travelled to Afghanistan and China from India, and it is no wonder that the paintings on the walls of the Central Asian monasteries were executed in the tempera technique like those at Ajanta. 'Ajantaism' assumed new forms in different spheres and in remote climes. Says the Sanskrit poet: *kshaṇe kshaṇe yun navatām upaiti tad eva rūpaṃ ramaṇīyatāyāḥ*, 'the nature of beauty is such as assumes new forms every moment'.<sup>5</sup> So does the art of Ajanta.

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THE earliest monastic centres in western India were excavated to serve Hinayāna Buddhism, the other school—Mahāyāna—being at that time non-existent. That rock-cut architecture was an imitation of buildings constructed in timber is nowhere so patent as at Bhaja, situated at the southern end of the Bhor-ghat, an ancient pass in the formidable Sahyādri range, where there is a *chaitya-griha* and a few *vihāras*. The vaulted ceiling of the *chaitya-griha* still retains the original attached wooden ribs, on which contemporary inscriptions have survived, to show

<sup>1</sup> Patna contains a Brāhmaṇical and two Jaina caves, J. Fergusson and J. Burgess, *The Cave Temples of India* (London, 1880), pages 428 and 492.

<sup>2</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, XII, *Khandesh* (Bombay, 1880), page 210.

<sup>3</sup> Ceylon has even earlier paintings, the earliest of them, believed to date from the second century B.C., being at Karambagola (Kurandaka-Lena) in the southern Province of Ceylon. Cf. *Buddhist Paintings from Shrines and Temples in Ceylon*, Mentor-UNESCO Art Book (New York, 1964), page 10.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Basil Gray, *Buddhist Cave Paintings at Tun-huang* (Chicago, 1959), page 22: 'In Turfan the earliest wall-paintings are those of Toyug, Chiqgan Kōl and Bāzālik no. 8, which date from the seventh century... It is agreed that it was by this route that Indian influence reached T'ang China, and there is an undoubted plastic quality in the figure drawing beyond anything found in China, produced by the extensive use of shaded modelling. But Indian influence is to be seen earlier in the Tun-huang style of the Wei period, in which musculature is prominently if conventionally depicted.'

<sup>5</sup> Māgha's *Śiśupālavadhā*, iv, 17.

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how the entire work was the result of donation of pious persons.<sup>1</sup> Once the practice started, the lay-community throughout the length and breadth of western India was actuated by a desire to have similar monastic establishments, and we find brisk activity going on in different centres. The excavation of the caves at Pitalkhora was patronized by rich merchants (perfumers) and the court-physician of Pratiṣṭhāna, those at Nasik by the royalty and lay-followers of Govardhana (near Nasik), the Kanheri (Kriṣṇagiri) ones among others by the craftsmen of Sopara, Kalyan (Kaliyāṇa), and so on.<sup>2</sup> Within seven centuries there sprang up cave-groups at places easily accessible from important towns<sup>3</sup> or situated off thoroughfares connecting different parts of the country—all beneficiaries of rulers, noblemen, merchants and others even residing in distant towns.

THE chronological order of the early *chaitya-grihas*<sup>4</sup> can be determined with a fair amount of certainty on the basis of architectural criteria corroborated by palaeographical and sculptural evidence, the principal architectural norm being: how far the features tend to copy wooden prototypes, the ones closely following them being older than those progressively deviating from them. Besides, the earlier *chaitya-grihas* had an open front, the portion below the *chaitya*-window being covered with elaborate timberwork forming a pillared portico. In course of time, the timber façade was replaced by stone screens divided horizontally into two storeys, the lower one pierced by doors and windows and the upper one with a central *chaitya*-window. This façade was further elaborated with *chaitya*-window ornamentation and railing-patterns in relief. The *chaitya*-hall at Karla, the most magnificent product of the early phase, has the side-screens divided into several horizontal rows, one above the other, and the entire storeyed arrangement is carried over the back of majestic elephant-figures.

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AT Ajanta, we have two *chaitya-grihas*, Caves 9 and 10, of the early period, the latter being earlier of the two and belonging to the middle of the second century B.C., a little later than the *chaitya*-cave at Bhaja. Cave 10 is spacious and imposing and is, like the Bhaja one, apsidal on plan. As usual, its central nave is separated from the side-aisle by a row of octagonal pillars, here thirty-nine in number; the aisle is continued round the apse and thus provides for the circumambulation of the *stūpa* placed within the latter. The inner vault, originally fitted with a network of curvilinear wooden beams and rafters and supported on pillars with a prominent inward rake, gives a feeling of wooden structure. The open front allows light in the interior

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Deshpande, 'Important epigraphical records from the *chaitya* cave, Bhaja', *Lalit Kalā*, number 6 (1959), pages 30-32.

<sup>2</sup> H. Lüders, 'A list of Brāhmī inscriptions', Pitalkhora: numbers 1187 and 1190-93; Nasik: numbers 1123, 1124, 1126, 1127 and 1129-34; Kanheri: numbers 988, 998, 1001, 1014, etc.

<sup>3</sup> The names of ancient places with cave-groups near them are given below. In Gujarat: Junagarh (ancient Girinagara)—Bava-Pyara and Uparkot caves. In Maharashtra: Bhokardan (Bhogavardhana), District Aurangabad—Ajanta and Janjala (Ghaṭotkacha) caves; Nasik (Nāsikya)—Pandu-lena caves; Sopara (Śūrpāraka), District Thana—Kanheri and Kondivte caves; Kalyan (Kaliyāṇa), District Thana—Kanheri and Kondivte caves in the north and Kondane cave in the south; Junnar (Jirṇanagara), District Poona—Manmodi, Ganesa-lena and Tulja-lena groups of caves; Karad (Karahāṭa), District Satara—Jakhinwadi (Yaksha-vāṭikā ?) caves; Kolhapur (with a mound known as Brahmapuri)—Povala caves; and Mahad (Mahāhāṭa ?), District Kolaba—Kol, Pala and Khed caves.

<sup>4</sup> The order of some of the principal *chaitya-grihas* can be worked as follows: (1) Bhaja, (2) Ajanta, Cave 10, (3) Pitalkhora, Cave 3, (4) Kondane, (5) Ajanta, Cave 9, (6) Nasik, (7) Bedsa, (8) Karla and (9) Kanheri, Cave 3.

## THE CAVES : THEIR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

and helps in no small measure to enhance the grandeur of this edifice. The next *chaitya*, Cave 9, excavated a century later, is, unlike Cave 10, rectangular on plan and has a covered frontage, suggesting a departure from the earlier tradition. A conspicuously-ribbed *chaitya*-window, originally with wooden latticework, is set on its façade above the central entrance-doorway. This cave is anterior to the *chaitya-griha* at Nasik, where the upper portion of the façade is further ornamented with *chaitya*-windows in relief and has contemporary sculptures of a *yaksha* and *nāgas* in animal-form. The Buddha-sculptures on the façade and sides of Cave 9 of Ajanta were added at a much later date under Mahāyāna influence.

THE early *vihāras* of Ajanta, Caves 8, 12, 13 and 15 A, the last one brought to light in the recent past, have plain oblong halls unsupported by pillars, with cells on three sides for the residence of monks. The only decoration in these early *vihāras*, which may antedate Cave 9 and have otherwise severely plain exteriors, is the relief-patterns of *chaitya*-windows, railing and stepped merlons above the doors of the cells. In their puritanic simplicity they reflect the austere life led by the monks in these monasteries.

ONE of the *vihāras* attached to the *chaitya*-cave at Kondanè, however, consists of a pillared hall and, along with the *vihāra*, Cave 4, at Pitalkhora, marks a departure from the general order of the early *vihāra*-architecture. The Pitalkhora cave is by far the most elaborate example in the early series,<sup>1</sup> with a magnificent sculptured façade with *chaitya*-window ornamentation in relief, a high plinth fronted by a splendid row of elephants and a covered entrance flanked by *dvārapāla*-figures. The interior cells for monks have vaulted and ribbed ceilings. This and the Kondane *vihāras*, carved almost immediately after the Ajanta ones but prior to the *chaitya-griha*, Cave 9, bespeak a high watermark of contemporary architecture and presage the later developments in the *vihāra*-architecture as observed at Nasik and even in the later Mahāyāna *vihāras* at Ajanta.

THE *chaitya-grihas*, Caves 19 and 26, and the *vihāras*, Caves 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, 17 and 20 to 24, that came to be excavated at Ajanta under the Vākāṭakas have a place of their own in the later development of rock-cut architecture in western India. While we have examples of contemporary *vihāras* in the Ghaṭotkacha and Bagh caves, the Ajanta *chaitya-grihas* of the period are unique, the Viśvarkarmā, Cave 10, at Ellora marking the culmination of this series. If the *chaitya*-cave at Karla is the best example of the early series, being described in the inscribed record as 'the most excellent rock-mansion in Jambudvīpa' (India),<sup>2</sup> Cave 19 of Ajanta, belonging to the period of king Harisheṇa (*circa* 475-500),<sup>3</sup> is the later *chaitya-griha par excellence*. It follows in a general way the plan of the early ones, the façade receiving the highest attention by the addition of an elegant pillared portico in front and by a skilful integration of its architectural and sculptural (below, page 28) decorations. The somewhat later (early sixth century) and larger Cave 26 has a pillared verandah in front in place of the portico of Cave 19 but is equally noteworthy for the profusion of sculptural wealth on its façade. Both the *chaitya-grihas* have a forecourt with attached pillared rooms to provide for the accommodation of priest-monks. Yet another *chaitya-griha*, Cave 29, standing at a higher

<sup>1</sup> For a description, see M. N. Deshpande, 'The rock-cut caves at Pitalkhora in the Deccan,' *Ancient India*, number 15 (1959), pages 66-93, particularly 73-76.

<sup>2</sup> H. Lüders, 'A list of Brāhmī inscriptions', number 1087.

<sup>3</sup> See above, page 16, note 5.

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level, is unfinished. Its incomplete façade and inner vault indicate it to be an excavation of the latest period.

THE later *vihāras* of Ajanta,<sup>1</sup> of which Cave 1 may be taken to be the most representative and a perfect specimen, presuppose a long development which can be traced to the earlier examples at Nasik and Kanheri. At Nasik, the *vihāras* of Nahapāna, Cave 8, of Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi, Cave 3, and that attributed to Yajña Sātakarṇi, Cave 15,—all of the early series and ascribable variously from the middle to the end of the second century A.D.,—have each a pillared verandah in front, though they have unpillared halls. In each the back wall of the front verandah is pierced, like the later Vākāṭaka ones, by a central doorway, side-windows and smaller doors, one on either side, allowing light in the interior. Cave 3 of Nasik has on its back wall a low-relief *stūpa* worshipped by females, forestalling the position of the *garbhagriha*, which in all monasteries of the later period houses a Buddha-figure. In an almost contemporary example at Kanheri, Cave 35, where, under Mahāyāna aegis, the inner walls were decorated with sculpture, the original façade consists of four octagonal pillars with square bases and the back wall of the verandah is pierced by a central doorway and two side-doors intended to illuminate the dark interior and to project the relieved carvings on the walls by means of side-light. At Ajanta, the central entrance-doorway, two large-sized windows, one on either side of the entrance in the back wall of the verandah, as also two side-entrances in some of the *vihāras* of the later period similarly help to light up the central hall and the side-corridors and more specially the paintings on the walls. Such a development was the direct result of necessity. When it was decided to introduce subsidiary shrines in the *vihāras*, proper arrangement for light was inescapable. Thus, Cave 2 of Ajanta which has subsidiary shrines on both sides of the rear wall, has also windows in the front wall admitting sufficient light to illuminate the shrines and the paintings contained therein. The caves are in fact bathed in subdued but pleasing light towards the evening with the slanting rays of the setting sun brightening the colourful world inside the cave.

THE façade of Cave 1 of Ajanta received a special treatment in that it had a pillared porch (now fallen) like Cave 19 and a verandah frontally supported by six elegantly-decorated columns, the sculptured capitals of which carry spectacular entablatures with friezes of sculptures, including scenes from the life of Buddha. The interior has a hall with twenty pillars and four pilasters arranged in a square and fourteen cells pierced into the walls. The central pillars of the back row are lavishly carved with extra ornamentation, again having on their capitals scenes from the life of Buddha. An antechamber leads the visitor to the sanctum enshrining a colossal image of Buddha (below, page 30). The other *vihāras*, including Caves 16 and 17, datable on inscriptional evidence to the end of the fifth century, follow the same pattern. Cave 4, one of the largest *vihāras* of Ajanta, can be definitely taken to be contemporary to, or very slightly later than, Caves 1, 2, 16 and 17 on the strength of a recently-found inscription on the pedestal of the image of Buddha in the shrine.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cave 15, with eight cells and an astylar hall, may be the earliest *vihāra* of this series. The Buddha-figure in the sanctum is stylistically earlier and is without attendants.

<sup>2</sup> *Epigraphia Indica*, XXXIII (1959-60), pages 259-62. The palaeography of inscription belies the earlier theories on the date of the cave, variously believed to be the third century, G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, III (Oxford, 1946), text, page 7, or the seventh century, J. Fergusson and J. Burgess, *The Cave Temples of India* (London, 1880), page 320.

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IN the fifth century and perhaps till a few years later activity at Ajanta was so brisk that work simultaneously progressed in different sectors. Together with the unimportant intervening caves, the *vihāras*, Caves 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7, were excavated at the outer end of the valley and 11, 16, 17 and 20 in the central sector. The other *vihāras*, Caves 21 to 24, together with *chaitya-griha*, Cave 26, all at the inner end, were commenced a little later but were executed within the sixth century, some left unfinished. Also to this later period belongs the double-storeyed *vihāra*, Cave 6, abruptly breaking the general level of the caves and having on its ground floor four rows of four pillars each, unlike the plan of the other *vihāras*, and on the upper floor a *garbha-griha* with standing figures of Buddha—a feature of the caves at Ellora.

THE Aurangabad group of caves draws its inspiration from the later caves at Ajanta, its unfinished *vihāra*, Cave 1, being the largest cave planned here, and another *vihāra*, Cave 3, being the most exquisite example of the period. A departure from the earlier tradition of painting on the wall-canvas stories of the Jātakas is first noticed here, the *Sutasoma-Jātaka* being sculptured on the architrave of pillars in the hall of that cave. This emphasis on sculptural decoration, noticed in Cave 26 of Ajanta (below, p. 33), asserts itself at Aurangabad, though painting is not wholly neglected. The Buddhist caves of Ellora form, as it were, an epilogue in the story of Buddhist rock-cut architecture, but for our present purposes it is needless to go into details about them.

## THE CAVES : THEIR SCULPTURE

THE SPLENDOUR of the paintings of Ajanta has overshadowed the elegance and serene dignity of its sculpture, as a result of which the latter has not received its due attention. Indeed, the sculpture of Ajanta, besides possessing a certain amount of classical excellence, is of great interest and importance to the study of the development of plastic art in the Deccan.

It must, however, be remembered that the sculptured figures of Ajanta were not meant to be seen, as they are seen now, shorn of the layer of plaster and painting, which anciently coated them<sup>1</sup> like the walls—a fact which is generally lost sight of. Large patches of painted plaster over the figures in Caves 1, 2, 16 and 17 are intact, and a careful look at them would convince one that the appreciation of the Ajanta sculpture in its extant form is bound to suffer if the transformation that a piece of carving underwent at the dextrous hand of the painter when he applied luminous colours on its surface is not taken into account. Such a treatment was bound to enhance the tridimensional effect of depth and perspective. The metamorphosis brought about in this manner was perhaps as enchanting as the transformation of a mountain-stream into a silvery streak at the touch of the rays of the autumnal moon.

### BACKGROUND OF SCULPTURAL ART IN THE DECCAN

THE sculptural art of the Deccan is so intimately connected with the architecture that neither of them can be dealt with in isolation. Within a century of the spread of Buddhism in western India under the direction of Aśoka (273-36 B.C.) a novel and dynamic architectural activity commenced in the area and excavation of caves for the residence of and worship by monks became the practice. It must, however, be remembered that excavation of a cave was itself the enterprise of a sculptor, who showed his capability not only in carving out a human or animal figure but something far grander and more monumental. In this sense the excavation was not an architectural endeavour but essentially a sculptor's dream coming to life with every stroke of the hammer on the chisel. Yet, the great halls—*chaitya-grihas* and *vihāras*—betray a strong influence of wooden construction so as to create an illusion of a building in wood.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The use of plaster and paint on sculpture is met with at Pitalkhora, as on the *yaksha* acting as *dvārapāla*, *Ancient India*, number 15 (1959), page 82. The marble sculpture of Amaravati was also covered originally with a thin plaster, coloured and gilt, A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), page 70. The colossal Buddha-image at Bamiyan (Afghanistan) was also painted, and Hiuen Tsang describes it as 'of a brilliant golden colour and resplendent with ornamentation of precious substances', Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India* (London, 1905), page 118. [A Sarnath inscription of A.D. 476 refers to the Buddha-image on which it occurs as having been embellished with painting (*chitra-vinyāsa-chītritām*), *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1914-15* (Calcutta, 1920), pages 124-25, Jagan Nath in *Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society*, XIII (1940), part ii, page 100.—Editor.]

<sup>2</sup> Western India, like other parts of India, had the tradition of wooden architecture. This is borne out by literary and archaeological evidence. The *Divyāvadāna*, edited by P. L. Vaidya (Darbhanga, 1959), pages 26 ff., refers to a sandal-wood merchant of Śūrpāraka who built a sandal-wood monastery at that place for Buddha. It also mentions, page 27, that Śūrpāraka had eighteen gates, which were presumably made of timber. Excavation at Bahal, District Jalgaon, revealed rectangular post-holes in Period II (*circa* 600-200 B.C.), suggesting the use of cut timber for buildings, *Indian Archaeology 1956-57—A Review* (New Delhi, 1957), page 18. The timberwork still attached to the ceiling of the *chaitya*-caves at Bhaja (second century B.C.) and Karla (first century A.D.) is also suggestive of the wood-tradition.



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Such masterly integration of architectural details of wooden construction in a non-structural building was indeed possible because the architect-sculptors were mainly drawn from the profession of carpenters, who took to the work of creating rock-cut mansions<sup>1</sup> and soon exhibited great proficiency therein. Goldsmiths<sup>2</sup> and ivory-carvers<sup>3</sup> joined hands with sculptors, and all together completed the requisite personnel for rock-carving.

### PHASES OF SCULPTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE CAVES

THE sculptural activity in Buddhist caves in the Deccan is broadly divisible into two main periods. Ajanta does not, however, contain any sculpture of the earlier period, covering about four centuries, from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D., when the Hīnayāna caves at Ajanta, the *chaitya-grihas*—Caves 10 and 9—and *vihāras*—Caves 8, 12, 13 and 15 A—were excavated. The lacuna is now filled by the fortunate discovery of a large number of early sculptures in the cave-group of Pitalkhora in District Aurangabad, about 70 km. to the west-south-west of Ajanta.<sup>4</sup> Sculptures in the caves at Bhaja, Kondane, Nasik, Bedsa, Karla and Kanheri further help in providing an almost unbroken tradition of sculptural art of the earlier period.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter there was a comparatively unproductive period in the northern Deccan, the centre having shifted to Āndhradeśa, where, under the patronage of the later Sātavāhana and Ikshvāku rulers, the existing art-tradition blossomed forth to decorate Buddhist monuments such as those at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The discovery of sculptured limestone slabs of the Amaravati type at Ter (ancient Tagara) in the Deccan attests to the synthesis of these art-traditions. The northern Deccan came into prominence once more with the rise of the Vākāṭaka power, when an all-round development of fine arts like sculpture, painting and architecture was witnessed. Under the new impact of iconic Buddhism, figures of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas came to be carved as the chief objects of worship in the caves. Vākāṭaka inscriptions in the Ajanta and Ghaṭotkacha caves would indicate that this second phase was ushered in in the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. Once a beginning had been made, side by side with the excavation of new caves the existing Hīnayāna ones were suitably modified and sculptures or paintings of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas were added thereto as at Pitalkhora, Karla, Nasik and Kanheri, while entirely new groups of caves were excavated at places like Aurangabad, Ellora and Ajanta itself.

### THE MAKE-UP OF AJANTA SCULPTURE

AJANTA imbibed artistic influences which penetrated into the Deccan from both the north and the south. The figure-sculpture of Ajanta thus reflects the best in the art-tradition of contemporary India, generally drawing its inspiration from the artistic movement set afoot

<sup>1</sup> A Karla inscription refers to a carpenter as having fashioned the façade of the cave, H. Lüders, 'A list of Brāhmī inscriptions', *Epigraphia Indica*, X (1909-10), number 1092.

<sup>2</sup> An inscription on the outer palm of a *yaksha*-image from Pitalkhora states that the image was fashioned by a *hiraṇnakāra*, goldsmith, *Ancient India*, number 15 (1959), page 82.

<sup>3</sup> A Sanchi inscription records that a carving (*rupakarma*) was done by the ivory-workers of Vidiśā, H. Lüders, 'A list of Brāhmī inscriptions,' number 345.

<sup>4</sup> *Ancient India*, number 15, pages 66-90.

<sup>5</sup> In a paper read at the Seminar on Indian Art History, 1962, organized by the Lalit Kala Akademi, the present writer made a plea for a Deccan school of sculpture and suggested an internal development within the school, *Seminar on Indian Art History*, edited by Moti Chandra (Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi), pages 16-25.

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under the aegis of the Guptas and Vākātakas, yet retaining fundamentally autochthonous elements. The basic character of the Ajanta sculpture is unconsciously but quite naturally related to the indigenous school of the Deccan sculpture which flourished under the Sāta-vāhanas and was later nurtured in the Krishna and Godavari valleys. Indirect influences also travelled from north India. A recently-noticed inscription<sup>1</sup> on the pedestal of a Buddha-image in the sanctum of Cave 4 of Ajanta states that the image was the *deya-dharma* or religious gift of a person named Māthura who was the son of Abhayanandin and the owner of the monastery (*vihāra-svāmi*). The name of the person may suggest that he hailed from Mathurā, an important centre of Buddhism and Buddhist art in northern India. The influence of Sarnath is apparent on the sculptured decoration introduced during the fifth and sixth centuries at several centres in the Deccan. The later carvings, specially in the *chaitya*, Cave 3, at Kanheri, show nearly the same refinement of modelling and spiritual expression as are met with at Sarnath. These features which form the fundamental characteristics of Gupta art are palpable at Ajanta in the standing figures of Buddha on the façades of Caves 9, 19 and 26 and particularly in the standing figure of Buddha in *abhaya-mudrā* in Cave 19. Barring such exceptions, the general character of the sculpture tends towards a certain amount of ponderosity and heaviness of form, though there was a conscious attempt at imparting a spiritual expression and finer sensitivity to the sculpture by means of refined modelling.

It is quite apparent that all the later caves at Ajanta were not excavated at the same time, though a few may have been produced simultaneously. Besides, they were the outcome of donations of different persons and consequently reflect the changing needs of worship and individual predilection of donors in the matter of sculptural decoration, though, on the whole, the chief architect-priest of the monastery must have exercised control over the general layout and execution of the plastic embellishment in his monastery. Taking into account the entire sculptural wealth of Ajanta, we can divide the sculpture into a few broad categories on the basis of its subjects.

### THE SUBJECTS

#### BUDDHA

As pointed out earlier (above, page 23), the worship of Buddha as the saviour of humanity had taken root in the Deccan by at least the fifth century A.D. and the artist took particular delight and care in fashioning his figure in rock. The representation of Buddha in both *chaitya-grihas* and *vihāras* became a necessity.<sup>2</sup> The colossal images of Buddha carved in the *garbhagrihas* located at the rear end of the pillared *vihāras* thus form a class by themselves. In this class Buddha is usually shown seated in *vajrāsana* with his hands in the *dharmachakra-pravartana-mudrā* (preaching pose). Flanked by a Bodhisattva acting as the whisk-bearer, the figures of Buddha have a sublime spiritual expression and are the very embodiment of *karuṇā* or benevolence. Among such figures, special attention may be drawn to the sculpture in Cave 1 (plate J), which represents the scene of the First Sermon in Mṛigadāva (Sarnath). The standing figure of Buddha in *abhaya-mudrā* (pose of assurance), as in Cave 19 (plate G), or sitting on a

<sup>1</sup> *Epigraphia Indica*, XXXIII (1959-60), page 260.

<sup>2</sup> In the almost contemporary Buddhist caves at Bagh in central India, the *vihāras* contain only the *stūpa* in the *garbha-griha*, while in one case only there is a figure-sculpture of Buddha flanked by the Bodhisattvas.

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lion-throne, as in Cave 26, both carved on the front part of a *stūpa*, follow the practice, originating in the Gandhāra country, of superimposing the cult-image on the *stūpa*. The images possess an air of spirituality and tenderness and can be ranked as specimens of a high order.

THE figures of Buddha flanking the entrance to the *chaitya*, Cave 19 (plates B and C), are remarkable examples where the sculptor has lavished all his skill in bestowing on the Master a superb expression of detachment as also of universal love. He has refrained from producing colossi but has, for once, produced masterpieces. The fine modelling and the delineation of feeling by subtle touches have given a rare charm to these sculptures. In another case, however, probably to match the greatness of Buddha, a sculpture of colossal proportions was carved in Cave 26, where the *parinirvāṇa* (extinction) of the Master is treated with an utmost warmth of feeling.

THE rising popularity of the worship of Buddha necessitated, in due course of time, his numerous representations. Standing figures of Buddha in the mendicant's garb and in *varada-mudrā* were carved in the antechambers of Caves 4 and 6. The shrine-door of Cave 6 contains a sculpture of Buddha seated in *vajrāsana* and protected by the *nāga* Muchalinda along with his other representations including one in *abhaya-mudrā* (pose of assurance). Smaller panels of Buddha in various attitudes also came to be carved at convenient places (plates B and C) around a principal image so as to frame it (plate E). To this class also belongs the manifold representation of Buddha (plate R).

### THE BODHISATTVAS

UNDER the influence of polytheism of Mahāyāna, the worship of the Bodhisattvas began to have an irresistible appeal to the Buddhist laity on account of the more humane qualities and the spirit of self-sacrifice of the Bodhisattvas to the extent of abjuring the highest knowledge and Buddhahood for the good of humanity. The Bodhisattvas who had been sculptured as attendants of Buddha now came to be carved independently. Particularly popular was the litany of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara depicted both in painting (*garbha-griha* of Cave 2 and verandah of Cave 17) and in sculpture (verandah of Cave 4 and a small and a large panel near Cave 26). The litany usually contains a central figure of Avalokiteśvara with eight small panels, four on each side, showing him in the act of giving protection to the devotees from the calamities of life. He is usually shown with *jatā-mukuṭa* (matted hair) with Amitābha on his forehead. He holds a lotus-stalk, with an opening bud in one hand and generally a rosary in the other. He is invoked in all cases of danger and distress, and it is interesting to notice that they are varied, such as those that a caravan-leader might suffer in his journey by land and sea, the fear of wild animals like the lion, elephant and cobra and of goblins, fire, assassins, incarceration and shipwreck. Such panels had a special appeal to the people engaged in commerce by land and sea. Similar panels are met with at the Buddhist cave-groups of Aurangabad, Ellora and Kanheri, the one at Aurangabad being the most vivid and best executed. One of the representations at Kanheri depicts Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara with his consort Tārā<sup>1</sup> standing

<sup>1</sup> In course of time similar representations with the central figure of Tārā came to be carved and one such litany is seen at Ellora (Cave 9), R. Sengupta, *A Guide to the Buddhist Caves of Ellora* (Bombay, 1958), page 20.

in the centre amidst smaller panels illustrating his benevolent actions in granting protection to devotees in distress.

#### THE NĀGAS AND YAKSHAS

THE worship of nature-spirits like the *nāgas*, the serpent-kings of the waters, and the *yakshas*, the rulers of the Four Quarters, has a hoary antiquity in India. Buddhism accepted these widely-prevalent and popular forms of worship and stories of *nāga-rājas* and *yaksha-rājas* were woven around Buddha. Early Buddhist literature including the Jātakas is permeated with numerous tales of the exploits of these nature-spirits. Older representations of *nāgas* exist at a number of early monuments. In the Hīnayāna caves at Pitalkhora,<sup>1</sup> Nasik, Kondivte and Thanala, the *nāga* is portrayed in the theriomorphic form, but later on he appears in an anthropomorphic form at the outer entrance to the courtyard of the principal *chaitya*-cave at Kanheri and on the façade of the Manmodi *chaitya* at Junnar, which are considered to be the last two *chaitya-grihas* of the Hīnayāna phase. At Ajanta, the *nāgas* are represented on the door-jambes of the entrance-doorway to *vihāras* and the inner cells containing the Buddha-image. In all cases they are depicted as performing the function of guardian-deities. *Nāgas* with a five-hooded canopy are also shown as worshipping the *stūpa* on the façade of Cave 19 (plate C). This particular subject is very interesting as the *nāgas* are shown in the aerial region in the place usually occupied by the *vidyādharas*.<sup>2</sup> That the *nāga* was believed to be capable of flying in the aerial region is not at all strange, for according to an episode in the *Mahābhārata* Takshaka, the king of serpents, having bitten Parīkshit, is credited to have moved through the aerial region.<sup>3</sup> Besides the *nāga-rāja* couple (plate D) described later (below, page 30), a separate anthropomorphic representation of *nāga-rāja* sitting on his coiled body is also seen in a special shrine situated halfway in the elephant-flanked entrance to Cave 16. An inscription in this cave mentions that the cave was provided among other things with a shrine for the lord of the *nāgas* (*nāg-endra-veśma*). This sculpture (not included in this Album) has considerable artistic merit. Smaller panels depicting the *nāga-rāja* with a five-hooded canopy and his consort with a single hood over the head are also carved in Caves, 1, 2 and 23. The *nāgas* by name Nanda and Upananda, supporting the lotus-seat of Buddha as also his manifold representations, are also depicted at Ajanta (below, page 34). The representation of *nāga-rāja* and his consort was an equally popular theme in the paintings of Ajanta. The *Śaṅkha-pāla-Jātaka* (Cave 1), *Champeyya-Jātaka* (Cave 1; plate XXXVII) and *Vidhura-paṇḍita-Jātaka* (Cave 2; plate LIII) contain some of the finest representations of the *nāgas* and the splendour of their watery domain.

REPRESENTATIONS of *yakshas* and *yakshīs* guarding the quarters of *stūpas* are also met with in early Indian monuments like Bharhut and Sanchi. In western India, the caves at Pitalkhora, Kondane and Nasik contain *yakshas* as *dvāra-pālas* guarding the entrance to the *chaitya*. They are also met with as supporting *vihāras* and holding with their upraised hands the bowl of plenty. At Ajanta a separate shrine in a *vihāra*, Cave 2, houses two *yakshas* of royal demeanour wearing a variety of ornaments like the clasp for keeping the ringlets of the hair in position,

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient India*, number 15, page 75.

<sup>2</sup> Similar representations of *nāgas* worshipping the *stūpa* from the aerial region are also found at Amaravati, J. Ph. Vogel, *Indian Serpent Lore* (London, 1926), page 130, plate X.

<sup>3</sup> J. Ph. Vogel, *Indian Serpent Lore*, page 68.

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*hāras*, *keyūras*, *udara-bandhas*, etc. They are flanked by female whisk-bearers indicating their regal character. The *chaitya*-window of Cave 19 is flanked by standing *yaksha*-figure (plates A and F), while that of Cave 26 is flanked by seated ones. A painted record with the name of *yaksha* Māñibhadra is seen on the left end of the verandah of Cave 17, but the painting of the *yaksha* himself is almost entirely obliterated.

Besides these representations, mention must be made of the sculptures of *yaksha* Pāñchika and his consort Hāritī, the goddess auspicious to children. Pāñchika (also called Jambhala, the Buddhist god of wealth) and Hāritī are invariably met with in the monasteries of the Gandhāra region and their worship also became popular in western India. Caves 2 of Ajanta (plate Q) and 7 of Aurangabad have subsidiary shrines dedicated to them, while at Ellora they are sculptured in a separate niche in the middle of the group of the Buddhist caves. At Ajanta smaller panels depicting only Hāritī with children or with Pāñchika are carved in Caves 2 and 23 on the architraves of the cells inside the *vihāras*.

### CELESTIAL BEINGS

IN the world of Ajanta the celestials commingle with human beings but are primarily depicted as subservient to Buddha and the Bodhisattvas and in the role of offering prayers or displaying their musical talent by singing<sup>1</sup> and playing on musical instruments. In the paintings they are shown in legions flaunting in the aerial region with effortless ease, but their representation in sculpture is limited. *Vidyādhars* are also shown in the aerial region but as offering garlands to Buddha (plates B, C, E and J). *Gandharvas* also make their appearance usually with their female partners (plate H), and the entire ceiling of Cave 16 is shown as supported on the backs of *yakshas*, *kinnaras* and *gandharvas*. The pillar-capitals of Cave 24 have some fine sculptural decoration, and the two ends of the brackets display *gandharva-mithunas* of extremely supple forms, the females gracefully resting on the floating male companions. As if to complete the depiction of the celestial region, *kinnara-mithunas* with human busts and bird-like lower parts are depicted amidst clouds as playing on musical instruments. A pot-bellied *yaksha* seated in quiet repose is also shown as enjoying a drink, attended by a maid holding a flask. *Vidyādhars* and *gaṇas* are also carved on pillars, the latter with cymbals or other musical instruments in their hands and keeping time to the melody of the *gandharvas*. The entire atmosphere of the *gandharva-loka* is thus recreated. The lithesome limbs of these celestials are shown in spritely but gracious movements and the onlooker feels that they are as living as the ringlets of clouds amidst which they are sculptured. Plate K shows, on the lower part of architrave, three *gaṇas* within the *chaitya*-arches carrying garlands in hands.

PITALKHORA provides the earliest example of a winged *kinnara* holding a bowl of flowers in his hand.<sup>2</sup> His lower limbs are covered with feathers and probably he had the feet of a bird. This is in accordance with the practice at Ajanta, but a *kinnarī* depicted at Bhaja (second century B.C.) in the so-called Indra panel is horse-faced, if she is not to be taken to be a *yakshī* with a horse's head<sup>3</sup> as is found at Bodh-Gaya. A flying *gandharva* holding a shield in one hand also comes from the same place. A Nasik cave-inscription<sup>4</sup> states that *gandharvas* along

<sup>1</sup> *Gandharvas* are described as *devā-gāyakas* in *Vishṇudharmottara*, third *khaṇḍa*, viii, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ancient India*, number 15, page 84.

<sup>3</sup> C. Sivaramamurti, *Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum* (Madras, 1956), page 75.

<sup>4</sup> J. Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions*, Archaeological Survey of Western India, IV (London 1883), page 108.

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with *yakshas*, *rākshasas* and *vidyādhara*s participated in battles; one of the functions of these celestial beings was, therefore, to help gods in warfare.<sup>1</sup>

### RIVER-GODDESSES AND MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS

IT is well-known that river-goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā are shown as standing on *makara* and *kūrma* respectively, one on either side of shrine-doors, and have a significant place in the architectural framework of entrances to religious edifices. This iconographic form has a long development starting with the representation of *yakshī*-figures at either end of the Sanchi *torāṇa*-architraves. A representation of Gaṅgā is noticed at Āmaravati as well, but the depiction of the twin rivers became popular only later on. Even at Ajanta the iconography was not sufficiently crystallized and both the deities, one on either side of the door-frame, stand on crocodiles below trees laden with fruits. In one case (plate N) the male attendant of the river-goddess stands on a tortoise. In Cave 27 the goddess stands on a *makara* under a tree; her left hand rests on the head of a dwarf, while on her right hand, which is flexed at the elbow, is perched a parrot almost in the act of uttering pleasantries to the sweet-faced damsel. The *ṛikshikās* or graceful maidens standing under trees, perhaps signifying *dohada* (longing), are also sculptured on the upper ends of the door-jamb.

YOUTHFUL couples (*mithunas*) are also set in panels along the door-frames. They have a special auspicious significance, and we find them sculptured in panels on door-jamb, sometimes one below another, as partly seen on plate M.

### DECORATIONS

BESIDES the above subjects, Ajanta has a fascinating variety of sculptured ornamentation. Rows of elephants with raised trunks in a jungle-setting or carrying branches of trees in their trunks, fights of wild buffaloes, *haṁsas* with flowing arabesques sporting in a lotus-pool and feeding on the pollens of the lotus—all these form the decoration on the façade of Cave 1 amidst scenes showing lovers in amorous sport. The diversity of other types of delicate carvings usually sculptured on pillars and pilasters is extremely bewildering. Consisting of floral patterns, medallions depicting the full-blown lotus, the conch, *makaras*, *haṁsas*, lotus-creepers, pearl-hangings, jewelry-patterns, *kīrttimukhas*, mythical animals, etc., they help in creating an atmosphere of warmth, delicacy and richness that is characteristically classical.

## COMMENTS ON PLATES A TO R

### FAÇADE OF CAVE 19 (plates A to F)

THE highly-ornate façade of the *chaitya-griha*, Cave 19 (plate A), has a wealth of sculpture, affording an opportunity for the study of sculpture of the classical period. Some plastic decoration cropped up here and there later on, but it only helps in understanding the artistic decadence and the changing pattern and needs of the faith. The façade was artistically conceived with a view to achieving an aesthetic unity by the harmonious blending of architecture and sculpture. The carvings on pillars and pilasters, the rows of *chaitya*-arches framing pretty

<sup>1</sup> R. S. Panchamukhi, *Gandharvas and Kinnaras in Indian Iconography* (Dharwar, 1951), page 19.

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faces, scrolls of foliage in horizontal bands—all these were introduced on the façade to project pleasing architectural features and to bring out the beauty of sculpture thoughtfully introduced at appropriate places.

COMING to the principal carvings on the façade, we notice two sculptured panels set within an architectural framework of delicately-carved pilasters on either side of the *mukha-maṇḍapa* (plates B and C) and a standing figure of *yaksha* Kubera on either side of the *chaitya*-window. The first set of sculpture flanking the entrance depicts Buddha. In the sinister panel he appears in his mendicant's garb at the palace-door at Kapilavastu where his son Rāhula led by his mother Yaśodharā receives the begging-bowl from him (plate C). His peerless wisdom and compassion are indicated by his superhuman stature and spiritual expression. The crown held over his hallowed head by heavenly cherubs further enhances this effect. The scene is, no doubt, inspired by the painting in Cave 17 (plate LXXVI) and is a masterpiece of Ajanta sculpture as the latter is of Ajanta painting.<sup>1</sup> The corresponding figure on the dexter side depicts Buddha in *varada-mudrā*, his figure steeped in *karuṇā*. On his right side is a standing woman bereft of all ornaments and near his left foot is another woman, this time prostrating. Probably both represent Āmrapālī, the favourite courtesan of Vaiśālī, who, according to Aśvaghosha, appeared 'in white garments and devoid of body-paint and ornaments before Buddha like a woman of good family at the time of worshipping' and 'prostrated her slender body like a blossoming mango-creeper and stood up full of piety'.<sup>2</sup>

As a total composition the principal figures in the niches flanking the entrance stand gracefully in slight *tribhaṅga* postures half-inclined inwards and, therefore, facing the devotee entering the shrine, their benign expressions creating a feeling of assurance in the heart of the worshipper. The soft mellifluous contours of the bodies which were enriched originally by painted plaster, coupled with the charming expression exuding spirituality, make these figures stand out from the rest.

THE adjacent panels on either side depict Buddha as cult-object of worship; on the sinister side (plate C) he is portrayed as standing in *varada-mudrā* on a double lotus against the drum of the *stūpa* under a finely-carved *makara-toraṇa*, above which rises the *aṇḍa*, *harmikā* and triple *chhatrāvāli* flanked by *nāga*-celestials. The corresponding panel on the right (plate B) has two compartments, the upper one having a seated figure of Buddha in *dharmachakra-pravartana-mudrā* and the lower, a standing figure, in *varada-mudrā*.

THE upper part of the façade is relieved by a central *chaitya*-window of an elegant design, with a figure of richly-bedecked and majestically-standing *yaksha* on either side (plates A and F). These two guardian *yakshas*, in the classical Gupta-Vākāṭaka idiom, are genetically related to the *yakshas* of the Sātavāhana period (Pitalkhora and Nasik). Verging on corpulence, they stand in *tribhaṅga* posture with a tight belt (*udara-bandha*) around their bellies. The general contours of the body are soft and fleshy. The legs are rather heavy and short but less so than their archetypes. The facial expression is calm and charming with a smile concealed under a thick lower lip. The round halo around the face bestows an air of spirituality. A dwarf attendant

<sup>1</sup> The same subject is also painted on the interior left wall of this *chaitya-griha*.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddha-charita*, xxii, 17 and 51. This identification is being proposed here for the first time.

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emptying the bag of wealth of its gingling contents adds greatly, by contrast, to the majesty of the *yaksha*, who has a Buddha-figure on his crest—a unique feature.

THE lord of the *nāgas* with his consort on his left and a standing whisk-bearer on his right (plate D), carved in a niche on the flanking wall at right angles to the façade of Cave 19, is a product of superb artistry. Steeped in dignity, he is seated on a rocky platform in *mahārāja-līlā* posture with a seven-hooded cobra behind his head. The form of the body is graceful and slim and has an expression of peace and devotion. The lavish ornamentation, besides adding beauty to the sculpture, makes up for the paucity of costume worn by the figures.

OPPOSITE the *nāgarāja*-image is the figure of Buddha (plate E) in *pralamba-pāda* posture and in *dharmachakra-pravartana-mudrā*. Absorbed in contemplation, he is seated on a raised platform and with the feet resting on a double-lotus pedestal. The miniature Buddha-figures bordering the principal niche are later additions, carved at intervals within the next century. It will be noticed that the lotus foot-rests of these miniature Buddhas were further amplified by the addition of a worshipper at either end, probably a donor in each case. Similar miniature Buddha-figures are also noticed on pilasters and below the principal Buddha-figure. See plates B and C.

### INTERIOR OF CAVE 19 (plate G)

THE lavish sculptural decoration on pillars and capitals and the triforium with a standing image of Buddha against the *stūpa* within a highly-ornamental niche in Cave 19 are features which attract the visitor and hold him spell-bound by its artistic charm. In contrast to the *stūpas* in Caves 10 and 9, this *stūpa* shows developed characteristics—with base-mouldings, a round *aṇḍa* and a tall *harmikā* with tapering triple umbrellas supported by *yakshas* and surmounted by a *pūrṇa-ghaṭa* reaching up to the vaulted ceiling. The serenity and charm of the central Buddha dominate the warm spiritual atmosphere of the prayer-chamber. He appears to symbolize the changeless among the constantly-changing phenomena of the world and the resort of the suffering humanity. On the capitals and the triforium are niches containing Buddha-figures in *dhyāna-mudrā* separated from each other by a variety of foliage-designs.

### CEILING OF CAVE 16 (plate H)

THE ceiling of Cave 16, a *vihāra* with some fine *gandharva*-sculptures carved on the capitals of pillars and brackets, is intended to convey the effect of a celestial region. The *gandharva*-couple illustrated on plate H, though bereft of the protective plaster-layer, is of supreme charm. The female is held in half embrace by her male partner on whose lap she is seated gracefully. The flowing wavy locks of hair of the male held in position by a clasp contrast beautifully with the *dhammilla* head-dress of the female.

### SHRINE OF CAVE 1 (plate J)

ALL the *vihāras* of Ajanta usually have a *garbha-griha* to enshrine a colossal figure of Buddha. Cave 1 contains a fine specimen of such a sculpture depicting Buddha in *dharmachakra-pravartana-mudrā*. On the pedestal is seen the Wheel of Law flanked by a deer on either side to suggest the provenance of the sermon, viz. Mṛigadāva (Sarnath). The main object of worship, Buddha, is flanked on either side by a stout whisk-bearer. These attendant figures are similar to the *yaksha*-figures on either side of the *chaitya*-window in Cave 19 in regard to



# BLACK-AND-WHITE PLATES

A TO R

*MEASUREMENTS (IN METRES) OF SUBJECTS ILLUSTRATED ON PLATES A TO R*

A 10.75 × 9.30	E 2.60 × 1.70	J 3.95 × 2.75	N 1.65 × 0.60
B 2.50 × 2.10	F 2.50 × 1.45	K 3.10 × 2.15	P 2.30 × 1.30
C 2.30 × 2.10	G 7.40 × 4.35	L 3.20 × 2.20	Q 3.05 × 2.60
D 1.60 × 1.35	H 0.80 × 0.70	M 1.80 × 1.30	R 3.65 × 2.35

*ERRATA*

In the captions of plates L and P, read 'Cave 26' and 'Cave 21' respectively for 'Cave 29' and 'Cave 23'.



PLATE A

Cave 19: sculptured façade



Cave 19: sculptures to the right of the entrance



PLATE C

Cave 19: sculptures to the left of the entrance



Cave 19: Nāgārāja and his consort on a rocky seat,  
on the wall to the right of the entrance



PLATE E

Cave 19: Buddha in a niche  
to the left of the entrance



Cave 19: *yaksha* to the right of the window  
over the entrance

PLATE F





PLATE G

Cave 19: interior



Cave. 16: celestial couple on the ceiling



PLATE J

Cave 1: Preaching Buddha in the shrine



Cave 1: sculptures over the cell to the right of the entrance. The central panel depicts scenes from the early life of Gautama

PLATE L

Cave 29: attempt of Māra's daughters to tempt Buddha





PLATE M

Cave 4: sculptural ornamentation on the right upper part of the door-frame of the shrine



PLATE N

Cave 20: aquatic deity to the right  
of the shrine-entrance

Cave 23: sculptured architrave in the hall

PLATE







PLATE Q

Cave 2: Hārītī and Pāñchikā in a shrine



PLATE R

Cave 7: manifold  
representations  
of Buddha

## THE CAVES : THEIR SCULPTURE

modelling (plate F) and may, therefore, represent the work of the same group of artists. The *vidyādharas* with garlands in hands on either side of the painted halo amidst clouds represented by ringlets are also well-conceived figures. The composition is extremely well-integrated and the attention of the onlooker is focussed on the main object of worship. The sculpture, however, tends to be rather heavy and lacks the grace of that on the façade of Cave 19.

### SCENES FROM GAUTAMA'S LIFE IN CAVES 1 AND 26 (plates K and L)

THE story-telling pattern followed in the paintings of Ajanta is at times repeated in sculpture. One such example is to be seen over the cell to the left of entrance to Cave 1 (plate K). The four great encounters in the life of Gautama which prompted him to forsake the life of pleasure are carved here on the façade. The life of pleasure led by the prince is also depicted in the panel above the central *chaitya*-arch, where he is seen listening to the music produced by a lady holding a *vīṇā* on her lap. The two panels to the right depict the young prince Gautama on a horse-driven chariot going for a ride, where scenes of death (extreme left), old age (left centre) and disease (right) confront him.

CAVE 26, a *chaitya-griha* not far removed in time from Cave 19, contains on its interior walls a large number of small and large sculptured panels, suggesting a definite departure from the earlier tradition of decorating the interior wall of caves with paintings. The wall-space on the left of the cave is covered by two large panels connected with the life of Buddha, while the rear and right sides bear panels depicting Buddha flanked by the Bodhisattvas. One of the former group is the attempted temptation of Buddha by Māra; its lower portion showing the dalliance of his daughters to allure Buddha is illustrated on plate L. Failing in his attempt to disturb Buddha meditating under the Bodhi-tree, Māra thought of spreading a golden snare and commanded his youthful daughters Rati (lust), Trishṇā (thirst) and Ārati (delight) to tempt him by their bewitching charm. Their coquettish gestures, attractive dance and melodious music—all failed to tempt Gautama and swerve him from the path of Enlightenment. They are then shown seated on the right lower portion with their father, dejected at the failure of their mission. The story-telling quality of the sculpture, the unity of the composition and the ingenuous disposition of the figures attest to the mastery of the sculptor in his art equalling that of his brother-artist in painting.

The emphasis on sculptural decoration in this cave is continued in the caves at Aurangabad and marks the beginning of a new mode of carving out large panels illustrating the principal theme of an edifying story. Also in the Brāhmanical Cave 21 (Rāmeśvara) at Ellora, of the beginning of the seventh century, this practice was followed; it was continued in the later caves of the place.

### DOORWAY OF CAVE 4 (plate M)

THE chief figure on plate M is a *vṛikshikā* on the upper part of the door-frame of the entrance-doorway of Cave 4, a *vihāra*. The graceful pose of this damsel standing below a tree with one leg bent and resting on the wall recalls the painting of Māyā in Cave 2 (plate XLIV). Standing under the luxuriant foliage of a tree, this semi-nude figure suggests that she belongs to the same tradition of the *yakshī*-figures at the end of the architraves of the Sanchi gateways. The sensuous figure, with heavy hips, a slender waist and a sumptuous bust, conforms to the traditional standard of beauty which is enhanced by her expression of repose. The bracket with the

## AJANTA MURALS

mythical animal with a stout *gaṇa* astride and the other architectural features and sculptured panels make the door-jambs very attractive.

### DOORWAY OF CAVE 20 (plate N)

THE female figure standing on a *makara* (crocodile) with one attendant standing on a *kūrma* (tortoise) presages the full-fledged iconography of the river-goddess Gaṅgā met with at Deogarh and other places. The figure displays a delicate sense of modelling and is an excellent specimen of female beauty conceived by the artist of the classical period.

### ARCHITRAVE IN CAVE 21 (plate P)

THE Ajanta artist decorated the architraves with sculptured panels set in beautiful floral and architectural framework. One such example, from Cave 21, illustrated on plate P shows a princely couple engaged in conversation.

### SHRINE OF CAVE 2 (plate Q)

THE worship of Hāritī and Pāñchika was gaining popularity, and at Ajanta, Aurangabad and Ellora we find them portrayed in separate shrines.<sup>1</sup> The Ajanta specimen (plate Q) is, however, the product of the story-telling tradition; the story of the conversion of the cannibal *yakshī* Hāritī into the guardian-deity of the new-born infants is represented in a synoptic manner. Hāritī with her lord Pāñchika is seated side by side on a raised stool, while two incidents of the former life of the ogress are carved in the background, one each on either side above the whisk-bearers. In one she is aggressively arguing with Buddha to restore her child purposefully concealed by the latter. In the other she attentively listens to the words of wisdom of the Master, who advises her to give up cannibalism and to take up the protection of the children of Rājagṛiha. On the pedestal are her children playing and undergoing instruction from the teacher. The whole subject was once painted and traces of plaster and paint are still visible. The principal figures remind us of the figures of *yakshas* on the façade of Cave 19 and the whisk-bearers flanking Buddha in Cave 1.

### MANIFOLD REPRESENTATIONS OF BUDDHA IN CAVE 7 (plate R)

WITH the decline of the artistic standards the sculpture, as also painting, lost elegance and artistic quality and merely repetitive subjects came to be carved. One of them is the Miracle of Śrāvastī, where Buddha multiplied himself to baffle his critics. Cave 2 contains painted panels with rows of Buddhas one over the other (below, pages 38 and 41; plate XLIX). On plate R the same subject, in Cave 7, follows the *Divyāvadāna* version, according to which the two *nāga* kings Nanda and Upananda created a miraculous lotus on the pericarp of which the Blessed One seated himself. Then, through magic, above this lotus were created multiple lotuses, each of which formed a seat for Buddha.<sup>2</sup> This story was popular and its representations in sculpture are found at Aurangabad (Cave 2) and Kanheri (Cave 25). The Ajanta specimen belongs to this class but is an inferior sculpture.

<sup>1</sup> It is said that to compensate for the loss of her livelihood (devouring of children), Buddha ordained that Hāritī and her family would be given sufficient food in every monastery. 'For this reason, the image of Hāritī is found either in the porch or in the dining-hall of all Indian monasteries depicting her as holding a babe in her arms, and round her knees three or five children', *Ising's Record of the Buddhist Religion*, translated by J. Takakusu (Oxford, 1896), page 37.—Editor.

<sup>2</sup> *Divyāvadāna*, edited by P. L. Vaidya (Darbhanga, 1959), page 100.

## THE MURALS: THEIR THEME & CONTENT

*‘Lokasmim hi chittakammato uttarim aññam chittam nāma natthi, “there is nothing finer in the world than the art of painting.”*<sup>1</sup> Thus begins Buddhaghosha’s commentary on what Buddha said about *charaṇa-chitra*. In executing a piece of painting, this idea first occurs to the mind of the painter: “Here these pictures should be drawn”. With this idea in the mind, the sketching, outlining, putting on the paint, touching up and other processes of painting proceed by means of the brush. As a result thereof, the desired figure appears on the canvas. Thereafter the artist gives a finishing touch by setting the details in their right places according to his own ideas.’<sup>2</sup>

**T**HE COLOURFUL and pictorial embellishment of the bare walls of the monastic cave-complex of Ajanta seems to be an incongruous phenomenon when we recall the austere attitude towards life in early Buddhism. The caves were intended to provide a quiet retreat for meditation and a place for the corporate residence and instruction of monks specially during the rains—they were the *varshāvāsa*, abode in the rainy season. The natural beauty of the Ajanta and other similar cave-groups and the appeal of Buddha’s message of love and benevolence preached by the resident-monks soon transformed these monastic centres into meeting-places of traders and other pilgrims not only from India but from many distant lands like China, Central Asia and the Mediterranean world. The visiting pilgrims—commoners, merchants and princes—imbued with a deep religious fervour vied with each other in making offerings to these establishments. Inscriptions carved in the caves of western India bear testimony to the munificence of Indian and Yavana (Graeco-Roman) merchants, the latter having settled down as traders at emporiums like Dhenukākaṭa.<sup>3</sup>

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IN order to preach the gospel of Buddha, the monks thought of converting the walls of the caves into an eloquent canvas; thus did the paintings take shape on the walls of Ajanta. No subject could achieve this purpose better than stories from the previous lives of the Master (Jātakas), where the would-be Buddha, in his careers as the Bodhisattvas, outshone others by his supreme intelligence, the nobility of his character, his spirit and selfless service and sacrifice and his boundless compassion—no matter whether he was born as a human or a celestial being, a small bird or a mighty elephant. Each Jātaka-story exemplifies the efforts that the Bodhisattva made to develop one of the ten virtues (*pāramitā*). The artist selected under the direction of the master-priest a particular Jātaka, for example the *Chhaddanta* to demonstrate the Bodhisattva’s boundless generosity, the *Vessantara* his charity, the *Vidhuraṇḍita* his wisdom. It will thus be seen that the narrative element plays a dominant part, as the intention was to emphasize the importance of virtuous living rather than the doctrinal aspect of Buddhism. To the delineation of such absorbing tales were added the principal events

<sup>1</sup> *Atthasālinī*, edited by Edward Müller, Pali Text Society (London, 1897), page 64.

<sup>2</sup> Benimadhab Barua, *Barhut*, book iii (Calcutta, 1937), page 76.

<sup>3</sup> H. Lüders, ‘A list of Brāhmī inscriptions’, *Epigraphia Indica*, X (1909-10), numbers 1093 and 1096.

## AJANTA MURALS

from the life of Buddha as Gautama—his birth in the Lumbinī garden, happenings in his childhood, Māra's futile attempt to tempt him, his attainment of the highest knowledge, the conversion of Nanda, subjugation of Nālāgiri, etc.

IN this respect Ajanta follows the well-established convention set up at the early Buddhist art-centres like Bharhut, Bodh-Gaya, Sanchi and Amaravati, where significant events from the life of Buddha and of his previous births were beautifully sculptured in panels, with label-inscriptions in some cases to facilitate identification. The elaboration of these edifying stories into well-knit compositions of successive scenes is seen in the reliefs at Sanchi and Amaravati. Understandably there were limitations in the carving of the details of the stories on stone. The Ajanta artist wielding the brush and colour with great facility used the prepared plain canvas of the walls to a greater advantage. He introduced new modes of his own in delineating successive events and in partitioning them with architectural, vegetational or other novel motifs. By an appropriate dispersal of the scenes on the canvas he could resolve the difficult proposition of showing the distance in time and space between two events. The exquisite colour-taste, perfect brushwork and sense of modelling lent vividness to and enhanced the dramatic appeal of these noble incidents. The old practice of giving labels was no more necessary, as the paintings revealed the subject with clarity, save when the subject was uncommon as in the *Kshānti-Jātaka* (Cave 2) or was freely rendered like the *Śibi-Jātaka* (Cave 17), where for easy identification the names of *Kshāntivādi* and *Śibirājā* are mentioned below their figures.

SUCH a realistic and yet imaginative depiction of the Jātaka-stories must have made a deep impression on the devotees of the spiritual grandeur of Buddha and the creed he preached. But the artist was not content with this alone. He brought to bear on the subject his rich imagination and a rare sense of beauty and imbued these tales with a sort of subtle realism by transporting modes and manners from contemporary life. The paintings, therefore, assume great interest as giving a vivid picture of the social life and customs of ancient India.

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THE subject-matter of most of the early extant paintings in Caves 10 and 9 (*circa* second and first century B.C. respectively) has not been fully identified. The long panel depicting the worship of the Bodhi-tree and *stūpa* by a royal party (plate I), however, clearly conforms to the early convention of depicting Buddha by symbols. The *Chhaddanta* or the story of the six-tusked elephant and the *Sāma* are the only two Jātaka-stories painted in Cave 10 as a result of this early artistic endeavour.

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THE middle phase of painting, commencing from the last quarter of the fifth century A.D., specialized in the depiction of narrative stories from the Jātakas and Avadānas, of which portions from the following are included in the present Album: *Śaṅkhapāla-Jātaka* (Cave 1; plate IX); *Mahājanaka-Jātaka* (Cave 1; plates X to XV and XVII to XX); story of Amarā from *Ummagga-Jātaka* (Cave 1; plate XXI); *Champeyya-Jātaka* (Cave 1; plates XXXIV to XXXVIII); *Vidhurapaṇḍita-Jātaka* (Cave 2; plates LIII and LIV); *Vessantara-Jātaka* (Cave 17;

## THE MURALS : THEIR THEME & CONTENTS

plates LVII, LVIII and LXIX to LXXI); *Haṃsa-Jātaka* (Cave 17; plate LXVIII); *Siṃhalā-vadāna* (Cave 17; plates LXXVIII to LXXX); and *Śibi-Jātaka* (Cave 17; plate LXXXII). Besides these, there are many other Jātaka-stories painted in great detail on the walls of Ajanta.

**DELINEATION** of the Mānushi-Buddhas in human form (plate LXII), whose worship had gained popularity, was another subject in which the artist took great delight and interest. The First Sermon of Buddha, a favourite theme in sculpture, has a fine parallel in a painting where Buddha, attended by celestials, *arhats*, princes and others, is shown preaching to the Congregation (right wall of the verandah above the cell-door, Cave 17). He is also shown elsewhere in this cave as preaching to his mother in the Tushita heaven and later on descending to the earth in two stages. His sermon to princes and disciples (plates LXXIV and LXXV) is treated with great imagination so as to bring out the solemnity of the occasion.

**DEPICTION** of the Bodhisattva not as an attendant of Buddha but as a viable subject also came into vogue. The two famous Bodhisattva-figures, on either side of the antechamber in Cave 1 (plates XXIV and XXXIII), were products of this class and exhibit artistic excellence.

**THE** growing influence of the Mahāyāna creed also brought in its trail the ideas of the Buddhist paradise: the upper portions of walls and ceilings of the *vihāras* were painted with celestial beings like *kinmaras* (plates XXIII, LX and LXXVII), *vidyādharas* and *gandharvas* (plate LIX), soaring in the heavenly regions amidst clouds. Floral patterns (plates XXV, L, LII, LXVII and LXXXIII), geometrical designs, jewelry-motifs, strange mythical beings (plates XVI and LXXIII), some sporting and others evoking humour (plates VIII and XXXIX), and playful birds (plate V) and animals (plates XXVIII and XXX) were portrayed along with objects of religious significance like the conch-shell or the full-blown white lotus—all adding to the rich variety the artist was fond of. At places the artist has demonstrated his keen observation of animal-life and painted scenes like the fight of two cocks or buffaloes (ceiling of Cave 17). The superb rendering of the two fighting bulls on the capital of a pillar in Cave 1 is another instance. The decorative band in the roundel on the ceiling of the *yaksha*-shrine in Cave 2 shows a chain of twenty-three geese amidst a lotus-creeper, each goose rendered naturalistically and yet differently from each other so as to evoke admiration for the artist who produced their graceful movements. The roundels with concentric bands of variegated colours and patterns around a central lotus with a *gandharva*-figure or couples in the corners amidst clouds (plates XLVIII and LVI) were a very common pattern of ceiling-decoration. Among other subjects in the ceiling-decorations the one showing a foreigner in a typical Iranian costume enjoying drinks and attended by male and female attendants (plate XLI) is specially noteworthy (cf. below, page 47, note 1).

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**THE** tradition of painting the flat ceilings of caves in compartments, such as we see at Ajanta, is also noticed in Buddhist caves even outside India, for example those at Tun-huang in north Central China. Commenting on the painting in Cave 428 of Tun-huang, Basil Gray observes:<sup>1</sup> 'the vault of the roof, which is naturally flat, simulates the lantern vault system of

<sup>1</sup> Basil Gray, *Buddhist Cave Paintings at Tun-huang* (Chicago, 1959), page 42, plate 17.

## AJANTA MURALS

construction as practised in a country of timber building, which is actually to be seen at Bamiyan, Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> The similarity of the subjects painted on the ceilings of Ajanta and Tun-huang is striking. At both the places the sunk panels contain lotus-motifs within crossed squares, while in the corners are depicted *gandharvas* at Ajanta and *apsarases* at Tun-huang. The rectangular spaces between the cross-timber vaulting in the *chaitya*-caves at Kondane and Karla also contain traces of paintings, and it would thus follow that the flat ceilings of the Ajanta *vihāras* simulated the construction of contemporary timber-structures used as *vihāras*.<sup>2</sup>

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A UNIQUE subject of philosophical import at Ajanta is the grand *bhava-chakra* or the wheel of life, painted on the left wall of the verandah of Cave 17. This wheel, which is partly obliterated, is held by two giant hands and when complete must have had eight compartments, further divided into sixteen in all. It is supposed to represent the Wheel of Causation<sup>3</sup> on the analogy of a Tibetan version of about the eighth century A.D. It may, however, represent an earlier conception of *samsāra* as contained in the *Saundarananda* of Aśvaghosha,<sup>4</sup> wherein Ānanda, while pointing out the absurdity of Nanda's infatuation to the paradise, tells him of the real nature of the world 'to be encompassed about by the disasters of birth, disease and death and to be revolving still in the cycle of existence, whether in heaven, among men, in Hell, or among animals or Pretas' The painting depicts in its various compartments different facets of life—scenes from gardens, market-places, the workshop of a potter, royal apartments, wooden hutments of the poor, monkeys and elephants—all intended to show the endless surroundings in which beings are placed as a result of their past actions.

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WITH the decline of artistic standards, the narrative scenes were replaced by repetitive representations of Buddha (below, page 41). They came to be painted as a result of the gifts of Śākya-bhikshus (Buddhist monks) for earning religious merit for the attainment of supreme knowledge by all sentient beings beginning with the donors' parents. A painted record below the figures of eight Buddhas in Cave 22 tells us that the painting was the gift of a Mahāyāna Śākya-bhikshu for the attainment of the supreme knowledge by all beings. The purpose of such gifts is further made clear by the statement that they endow the donor with good looks, good luck and good qualities. In the *chaitya-grihas* with early paintings (Caves 10 and 9), where Buddha had been depicted symbolically by the Bodhi-tree, additions were made almost after eight hundred years, when Buddha in various attitudes and the Bodhisattvas were painted on the available wall-surfaces and pillars in an effort to recondition these *chaitya-grihas* for iconic worship. In these paintings (plate LXXXV) Buddha is shown seated on a full-blown

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India* (Harmondsworth, 1956), plate 56.

<sup>2</sup> The wooden ceilings of the Buddhist *gumphās* at Tabo, District Lahul and Spiti, Panjab, indicate what kind of ceiling the artist had in mind when he painted the surface at Ajanta. At Tabo the surface of beams and rafters and the sunken spaces enclosed by them is also painted. These paintings on the ceiling, though later (*circa* eleventh century), undoubtedly follow the ancient Ajanta tradition. The Tabo monastery was recently visited by the writer when this observation was made. The attention of the writer has been drawn to the nature of the Ajanta ceilings by Shri G. S. Haloi. Cf. J. Griffiths in *Indian Antiquary*, III (1874), page 27.

<sup>3</sup> L.A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet* (Cambridge, 1958), pages 107-09.

<sup>4</sup> *The Saundarananda*, edited by E. H. Johnston (Oxford, 1932), xi, 62.



## THE MURALS : THEIR THEME & CONTENT

lotus against a bolster. The devotee who caused the figure to be painted also sits near the Master with his hands folded in *añjali-mudrā*.

THERE is yet another interesting representation of Buddha in Cave 10, where flames are shown as emanating from his halo. The worship of Buddha as a Pillar of Fire is met with earlier at Amaravati.<sup>1</sup> Sculptures of Buddha with flames issuing from the shoulder are also reported from the Gandhāra region.<sup>2</sup> The depiction of Buddha at Ajanta as surrounded by a flaming aura is not, therefore, unusual. Agni (fire) also denotes supreme knowledge (*jñānāgni*) and the effulgent flames around Buddha would stand for his spiritual light dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

THE theme of the Miracle of Śrāvastī (plate XLIX) became popular, and rows of Buddha-figures, one above the other, came to be painted. The repetitive theme reflects the artistic tendency of the age: the paintings lack the vigour, imagination and delicacy of the earlier ones. A fragmentary painted record on the back wall of the antechamber to the right of the shrine-door in Cave 2 may record the donation as that of the 'Thousand Buddhas' (*Budhāsahasa*). This record is attributed to the sixth century. There are numerous other painted records below the figures of Buddha in other caves indicating, on palaeographical grounds, that they belong to the same century, if not to the next, and form the latest additions on the canvas of the Ajanta monasteries.

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THE cumulative effect of the large variety of subjects on the devotees must have been of enraptured devotional zeal and piety—the purpose for which they were intended.

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), figs. 4, 6 and 10. He suggests: 'There is some reason to suppose that the Pillar of Fire type is in a special way connected with the Māra Dharṣaṇa and Mahāsambodhi', *ibid.*, page facing plate III.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1921-22* (Simla, 1924), page 65, plate XXV(a).

## THE MURALS : THEIR ART

**T**HE AJANTA murals are a picture of harmony between the ethos of the theme and the means by which the ethos has been expressed. Only a sound tradition of experimentation with and experience of the media could have given the artist the necessary background for achieving what he did. But whereas the successive stages of the development of sculpture, from the earliest archaic figurines to the beautifully-moulded products breathing in forms, are traceable, unfortunately no material is left at hand to give evidence to concurrent development of painting.

**WHAT** actually happened during the period between the idiomatic paintings in the rock-shelters of primitive man and the murals of Ajanta is a lost chapter in Indian art-history. The void between the colour-drawings of the former and the sophisticated paintings of the latter remains unaccountable. Although we ponder over the question from where the seeds of the Ajanta style of painting sprang forth, we know they were there, they germinated in the quiet, took form being grafted on the walls (in the second century B.C.), where they cocooned for centuries (till about A.D. 450)—a period during which no work seems to have been done,—later to emerge as paintings vastly original and matured in a style of their own.

**ABOUT** half of the total of finished and unfinished caves were once adorned with paintings. In the present Album we are, however, satisfied with presenting plates from the best-preserved murals of six caves. They are shown in the following order: Caves 10, 6, 16, 1, 2 and 17 and again 1 and 10. As far as we know, the earliest paintings at Ajanta date back to the second century B.C., while the latest must have been executed over seven hundred years later. During this span of time the murals underwent stylistic changes which are visible not only by comparing caves with caves but also panels with panels within the same caves. As an example of the latter we choose Cave 10 which holds not only the oldest paintings but probably the latest as well. Plate I and the last, LXXXV, in this Album, both from Cave 10, represent these two extremities.

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**ARTISTS** working over a span of centuries could not have kept their bearings had not faith perfected the work of cementation. Thematic steadfastness apart, stylistic changes were bound to occur, but to what extent and where it is difficult to pinpoint. The aesthetic level must have its rise and fall as the date spread over centuries. Consequently the paintings at Ajanta grew on the walls, reached their culmination and also met with decadence there.

**CONSIDERING** plate I,<sup>1</sup> Cave 10, where devotees proceed toward the Bodhi-tree with their offerings, we come across a painting of the earliest period. Being a singular reflection of the

<sup>1</sup> Plate I, Cave 10, is the only sample in this Album of a reproduction made from a copied painting of the original, the original being too obliterated to lend itself to photography.

## THE MURALS : THEIR ART

Hinayāna Buddhism, the mural is restrained and prude; but as an example of embryonic painting the 'canvas' is astonishingly free and imaginative, bearing resemblance in composition and outlay to contemporary sculptured reliefs of the *stūpas* at Bharhut and Sanchi (see also drawing of the whole panel, fig. 1). The frieze has been drawn in one horizontal plane maintaining the same tonal level, as if nailed to the wall without highlighting the transgression of planes by shading or drawing marked body-contours, as seen in the paintings of the later period (plates XLVI and LI), where the figures show sculpturesque and forthcoming qualities, breaking the flatness of the surface by indicating scope for spontaneous and life-like movements. Being representatives of the Mahāyāna faith with its complex thought-pattern and rich imagery, the paintings too grew exuberant and ornamentative. The Mahāyāna spirit crystallized itself in a stress on ritualistic details and many-faceted life. The colour-scheme, which in the earlier paintings (plate I) was rather formal and limited to different hues of ochres, became in the later ones more distinguishable and vivid with the addition of lapis lazuli, a blue colour probably from Iran. Being imported, it was precious and therefore discreetly applied. Its limited use made its brilliance self-evident.

THE bulk of the plates is representative of middle and late-middle periods when Ajanta paintings were at their height. The late-middle period showed signs of mannerism in style, which subsequently passed into decadence. A discussion on the plates showing such mannerism is the most convenient study-material for grasping the very style which we may term as Ajantism. Since mannerism is nothing but a repetition of what is particular in style, the rendering of it without discrimination exaggerates the best while inadvertently exposing the weakness too. Cf. plate LXIX, where the self-assured mastery of the sweeping lines becomes facile but is nevertheless indicative of the power latent in the elegance of curved lines. Such lines reveal a particular creative dimension, changing in its meaning according to the environment and placement of the object. The pressure of the brush makes the line appear thick or thin, to have the desired effect. Thick, wide and deep lines become forms in themselves; while thin, sharp and precise lines take a calligraphic character. (Plates IV and XII are examples of the former and plates II and LXXIV of the latter.) Even the colours of the lines assume different shades—varying from Indian red to dark-brown and black—depending on particular needs and very often changing from colour to colour within a limited area (cf. plates XIV and XX). The difference of artistic impact that lines can have when applied in modulation as a painter's characteristic part of a picture, as against mere graphic representation, can be seen by comparing the original plates with the line-drawings in the figures.

THE painting on plate LXXXV, which is a specimen of the period of decadence, presents two seated Buddhas in teaching attitude, with disciples kneeling with folded hands. These are only two of many similar Buddhas that we find enclosed in separate cubicles, horizontally covering the whole of the upper panels of Cave 10. Compared with other Buddhas of the walls of Ajanta painted earlier, they lack refinement and finish. The colours are naïve, flat and unnuanced—lines wanting in feeling and resembling mediocre *tankas*.

PROBABLY belonging to the same period, the painting on plate LXXXIV, from Cave 1, is a glaring example of the change of style and execution. Both the drawing and finish are

## AJANTA MURALS

degenerate, and when compared with other paintings of the same cave (particularly plate XXIV) it appears clumsy and bare. Viewing critically, we notice that the refinements that are present in the others are non-existent here: gone are the shapely palms and sensitive fingers. The entire portrayal is in rather stiff and simplified lines, which have nothing in common with the linear expression of soft curves typical of Ajanta. This odd but rather expressive picture, which is part of a larger damaged panel, has baffled scholars, who have not yet been able to identify the subject-matter.

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THE kinship between sculpture and painting that we find in India is something altogether unique in the history of world-art. Most impressive is the way the two art-forms co-exist at Ajanta, complementing each other. Artistic ingenuity has reinforced the relationship. The blending achieved must have been astonishing when the stone carvings were bedecked in colours, falling in line with the hue and colour-scheme of the murals. Although we usually find thematic parallelism between sculpture and painting, they apparently functioned separately using compositional references from within their own kinds. In certain instances, however, we find planned interaction. Cave 1 lends testimony to this observation. The farther we proceed into the depth of the cave the nearer we come to the image of worship, culminating at a stage when the paintings on the walls become secondary, a plausible adjunct focussing on an awe-inspiring sculptured Buddha. The scenic tone is stupendous, the compositional fusion is at its height. The large painted panels narrate stories of Buddha's prior incarnations, while on either side of the door leading to the antechamber we come across the twin images of Bodhisattvas rendered in great stature (plates XXIV and XXXIII). The entire setting is studiously premeditated. As it were, the placement of these two giant-sized personified paintings was with the sole intention of preparing the pilgrim for his final revelation, for his humbling himself before the magnificent sculptured Buddha reposing in the inner shrine.

PLATE LXII renders the rhythmic representation in Ajanta art. Each figure is in concord with the other, sculpture blends with the murals, colours with the colour-scheme, flower-studded door-panels with the glowing wallscape and the decoratively-painted ceiling. A close-up, as seen on plate LXIII, speaks of the marvellous interaction where the mood of the *mithunas* (couple) is shared by the coloured girdles enclosing it. The frieze of the *mithuna*-figures, who are heavenly lovers in their acts of endearment, has been placed on the proper pedestal, with a row of Buddhas seated above together with Maitreya, the Future Buddha, on the extreme left. Even though framed they are not rigidly bound and are in interplay with the rest—each presented in alternate *mudrās*. Two exquisite sculptured figures of riverine deities lend support and add welcome grace to the doorway of Cave 17. A yearning for mutual exchange and unity that we find here permeates throughout the walls of Ajanta, resounding the story of this unity bonded in faith.

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THE agreement existing between the ethos of the themes and their pictorial representation has been referred to above (page 40). We now explain how this has become manifest in

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paintings throughout the walls. There is one theme, a single *leit-motiv* running through the panels—a theme often emphasized in the Buddhist credo—the concept of impermanence, how everything is fated to change, how the baby in the mother's arms changes to become the dying man. This concept distinguishes the nature of the worldly from that of the divine. The worldly has been rendered in its glory removed from meanness and evil,<sup>1</sup> and the divine in its divinity.

As the artist used the world as his model—and it is common knowledge that likeness with nature was the accepted artistic maxim—he was not for belittling man and his life nor for commenting on social justice. He did not altogether escape reality, for he took delight in the depiction of extravagance that was surely representative of contemporary court-life that it was lived with zest and joy. Surrounded with the paraphernalia of daily rounds he did not overlook humour and comic, nor the pathos and tragedies concomitant to life. That stamp of impermanence, as typified in the excess of emotions, over-emphasis of sensuous forms, characterization of fleeting moods, has been arduously depicted and contrasted against the rocky permanence of religion, and ultimately of Buddha.

WHEN it came to portraying Buddha himself, the artist was seemingly at his wit's end. He was to convey the impression of one who was beyond him, undepictable. He eased the task by presenting Buddha within the prescribed details of iconography and iconometry, realizing him in abstraction. As a result, we find his image either contained in bounded repetitious forms or in superimposed generalizations conveying an idealized identity. The Great Buddha manifested himself teaching (*dharma-chakra*), meditating (*dhyāna*), assuring (*abhaya*) or subduing Māra (*bhū-sparśa*), and this eloquence has been conveyed by the various *mudrās*, i.e. the poses of his hands. Even when confining him within the bonds of the brush, the artist has given him sculptural forms, dynamic and yet placid.

TAKE plate LXXVI: mother and child meet Buddha. A scene which would have normally been given to emotional drama—a husband meeting his wife after long years—here becomes symbolically depersonalized. The Great One with his begging-bowl—an affirmation of renouncement—is greeted by his wife, helping their only son Rāhula forward. She receives the lord—once of her house, now of the universe—in dual acceptance. The structure here is like two pyramids—one big and the other small. The larger bends forward, comes nearer earth and appears smaller; while the smaller looks up, strives to reach the hallowed lord who has taken his stand at the door-step. These two contrasting forms are set against a dark neutral background, highlighting the glow of the saffron robe. The shine is effulgent enough, illuminating everything around.

WHEN figuring Buddha, not all the artists reached the mark. Conventional norms and formulæ, in certain instances, have had preferences over artistic empathy. An observation of plate XLIX, the 'Thousand Buddhas', will demonstrate that conventionalism and mechanical representation rather than artistry inspired the scene. Trying to impart some

<sup>1</sup> There are a few exceptions, such as the scenes (not included here) depicted on the right wall, main hall, Cave 17, of the *Siṃhalāvadhāna*, which are gruesome to the extreme. Another example, in Cave 1, shows a tray with four severed heads (plate XXI).

artistic interest in the panel they took care to vary Buddha's postures and *mudrās*. The painters did also introduce an element of colourfulness by painting the robes of Buddha in different colours ranging from white, grey, brown, green and red.

ON the rock-wall are woven Jātaka-stories which expound the ethics leading to the final Enlightenment. The principal figure of these stories is the Bodhisattva, manifest in innumerable characters and each representing an account of the previous lives of Gautama Buddha. The Bodhisattva is a being of the divine order and, therefore, even in his worldly role is emphatic of his distinctiveness and understanding. The Bodhisattva was not necessarily a human being; he often took the form of an animal—yet expounding and meaningful. On plate LXVIII, Cave 17, we find the Bodhisattva in the guise of a golden duck. In other words, Bodhisattva is 'wisdom in disguise'. In each new incarnation he retains the bodily form that he has chosen for himself, he is the bridge between the two worlds—the worldly and the divine. When born in the frame of a man he is the superman amongst men, untrammelled and radiant.

PLATES XXIV and XXXIII show two Divine Bodhisattvas. These paintings have earned laurels for their rare ability of endowing personalities with the stamp of 'detached greatness'. They are towering but not exuberant. They have all that make human virtues, only more of it. Large features, princely attires, imposing head-gears and abundant jewelry have made them more impressive than the rest. Even in stature and dimension they stand in contrast to others. The artist has perhaps been freer in painting the Bodhisattva than Buddha himself, in spite of having to obey codified canons of Buddhist iconography. Though not particularly masculine, these figures of the Bodhisattva are represented by qualities of calm and intense self-concentration. They share features which are typical of the portraiture of Ajanta: the body is delineated in a general manner, while hands and faces become the carrier of their individualities.

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THE artists were all men, probably living in great isolation and under a severe discipline, communicating with none else but themselves, monks and dedicated artisans. Conditioned by her very absence, they created the image of woman as was impressed upon their memories—idealized and platonic. Traditional concept of motherhood made her symbolic of it, and yet a being of life she is a woman on all counts—shapely and luscious. When they portrayed the glorified man, they figured him as a saint, ascetic or one in quest of the lord. The little man is also there, seemingly insignificant, but a dedicated being all the same. Heavenly and even superhuman characters of the Buddhist pantheon which we find all over the walls and ceilings of Ajanta also appear essentially human. Consequently we find *nāgas* (serpent-kings—semi-divine beings, as on plates XXXVII and LIII), *apsarases* (celestial belles, plates LIX and LXV), *yakshas* and *yakshīs* (male and female heavenly beings, plates XLII and LXXII), *kinnaras* (heavenly musicians, plates XXIII, XLII and LX), the already-mentioned *mithunas* (heavenly lovers, plates XXII, LVI, LXII and LXIII) and others,—except for a few iconographic distinctions that identify their kinds—tallying with the general artistic representations of human forms.

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ON pictorial scenes crowded with people perhaps women outnumber men. While men are engaged in more emphatic actions such as riding, giving audience, preaching or otherwise, we find women involved in activities less poignant and yet invitingly eye-catching, expressing surprise, sorrow or some emotional output. She is mostly in the background of a complex scene though glorifying it. Hers is the charm of the refined body, supplying emotional bias to each composition. As jewelry matches feminine grace, so have women contributed to the ornamentation of the scenes. Dressed in translucent muslin, allowing attention to immaculate shapes and curves, they are just living graces.

PLATE VII is a detail of a much-damaged large panel in Cave I. It is an example of one of the many damsels dressed in 'nakedness' and Ajanta imagery. The painter has utilized all artistic means in order to emphasize the theme in its minutest details, making all the accompaniments support the emotional content of the motif. A well-built maid in glowing skin and plentiful jewelry tends her mistress, a suffering princess reclining on a couch. On the plate we see only the attendant as she bends over the rails holding a pitcher in her hands; while water and flower-petals pour out, she literally pours herself. It is not a mere depiction of a scene, it is a piece of dedicated painting saturated with pathos. This pathos may appear exaggerated, yet the principal character is simply self-effacing, in complete unison with the spirit of dedication. The circular lines out-pointing the pitcher become the centre of gravity, round which every movement takes its form. All other curves stroking the body-line, head or bust are downward and heavy-laden; the anxious eyes of the attendant shower benediction as the cool water becomes her extended self.

THE Venus ideal differs from culture to culture, age to age. At Ajanta we notice variations in the classical concept of Indian feminine beauty. A scrutiny of plates XIV, XXVII, XLIV, LI, LXIV and LXXXI will give us an exemplary insight into the different representations. The variations are subtle and not obvious. Physically speaking they are closely alike; with curvatures and convex forms they resent being held within their builds—the lines that thread them are stretched to bursting and yet sustained. Circular lines have done wonders. Bodily curvatures extend themselves into every mould—from full breasts to pouting lips, from round eye-balls to ear-rings, from tips of nose to touches of highlights distributed in small whitish patches all over her body. For the particular effect of highlight see plates XIII, XXVI and XL. Each colour adds lustre, and each part of the body becomes a natural extension of the other, being different only in treatment and scope. In creating the heads and hands the artist took the greatest care, which is seen in equal accentuation whatever the object of his brush, be it male or female.

SOMETIMES we notice differences in quality between the execution of the various parts of the human body. Therefore it may possibly be correct to assume that several artists worked together on one and the same painting, as we know was the custom with artists of the later period who excelled in miniature painting. For instance, some might have specialized only in portraiture, leaving the rest to be finished by others.

TRADITIONAL rendering of the eye should resemble and be based on similes drawn from plant- or animal-life. Depending on the emotions to be conveyed, the model became a stylized

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design of a flower, fish or a bird; but an added refinement of lines and the finish of colours made them intrinsically human, intensely expressive and distinguished (cf. plates XXXV and LXXII). Sensuous lips, ripe and full like the *bimba*-fruit (*Momorda monadelphica*), with the lower lip protruding, were perhaps once covered with *hingula*-red, which has long since faded, often revealing the white plaster underneath, as on plates X, XXVI, LXV and LXXII. The eyes and lips that we come across on the walls of Ajanta have their prototypes in real life. Yet in harmony with the age, the woman of Ajanta remains impersonal and aloof, concealing her individuality, although making it impossible not to take notice of her. Her modulous hands feelingly raised expose fingers likened to lotus-petals. Fingers nimble and sensitive, as if indicative of her thoughts, match perfectly with the rest of the movements and blend in the direction and glances of her eyes (cf. plates VI and LV).

**THE** next emphasis is mainly on the upper limbs of the body, the neck, the bust and the waist, but also on the hips—delineated in greater details and precision of forms than the lower parts. Particularly the pitcherlike breasts, so full of warmth and shape, stand in an incredible contrast to her slim waist (cf. plates VII and XIV).

**INTERESTINGLY** enough, more often than not the legs appear to have been finished in a hurry and touched upon as little as possible. In agreement with an old belief, the thigh and leg-line should be analogous to the trunk of a banana-tree drawn in parallel lines, the feet to the leaves of a plant, neither of them revealing the bone-structure (cf. plates XL, XLIV and LXXXI). This way of representation ignores the anatomy of muscles and has been termed 'artistic anatomy'—a phrase coined by Abanindranath Tagore. Here we are faced with the perfect feminine species supported by tapering legs, at times so thin as to raise doubt whether they could sustain the body-weight.

**MORE** important than such details was the emphasis laid on her gait, and the whole figure structured round three main axes in order to conform to the *tribhaṅga* pose. This concept is well-known in Indian classical art and is practised by dancers. It gives the body an 'S'-shaped rhythm, a fluency of lines, which, together with the appropriate gestures of hands, convey a wide range of expressions. Plate XI presents to us a dancing-scene, where the movements of the swinging body stretch in different directions within the imaginary frame, pivoting on the three main axes—hips, shoulders and eyes. The force of the rhythm as delineated in the central figure is reinforced by the reversedly-drawn *tribhaṅga* poses of the two flute-players on her right. The woman on the right on plate XIV and the damsel on plate XXVII are equally good examples of the bold 'thrice-broken' pose. Plate XXIV, of the famous Bodhisattva Pādmapāṇi, on the other hand, gives a more oblique realization of the same.

**INDIAN** art of every form was just saturated with the notional concept of 'rhythm'. Consequently both *chitra* (painting) and *nṛitya* (dancing) were expected to contain a 'rhyme' almost similar in content, both aiming at reproducing the basic life-giving movements. Thus, *chitra* on the walls of Ajanta becomes a tableau-wise representation of performing characters, *tribhaṅga* postures being admirably juxtaposed.

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## THE MURALS : THEIR ART

THIS spontaneity of movement is particularly prominent in the flower-decorations of the ceilings; the lines now uninhibited and set free from illustrating story-telling themes create fantasies and rich imagery by inventing geometric patterns, flower-arabesques, fruits, birds—real and unreal—mythological creatures and other gay themes. They give the impression of being hallucinatory imitations of reality. From the artistic point of view, the painting on the ceilings shows power of imagination, perhaps even excelling the wall-murals. The ceilings were set apart and did never carry religious motifs, yet kept a bearing with the walls—their colour-scheme, delineation and repetitious themes were rendered with equal craftsmanship. The ceiling in their unconcerned and humorous drawings became a glorious counterpart to thought-provoking Jātaka and other Buddhist stories. Those drawings have taken the texture of a carpet, brilliantly woven, immediately captivating the eyes and filling the senses. They do not throw a challenge to the intellect but cover the void, above the walls, with idyllic coloured designs.<sup>1</sup>

SET in contrast to the dynamic walls full of action, we find the ceilings different; here colours gush out, take form and convulge on each other, wave upon waves. Although there are subtle variations between the ceilings of different caves, in the main they are of the same kind, with common pet themes appearing invariably over and again. One of them is the huge concentric circle enclosed in a square, with innumerable diminutive flowery bands within it, as are usually to be found in the centre of the ceiling, main hall, antechamber and inner shrines (cf. plate LVI and also plates XLV, XLVIII and L). Another equally-cherished theme is squarish and rectangular spaces of different dimensions placed next to each other, framed in narrow panels carrying key-patterns or other geometric designs and used as a device for separating different areas. Plates XXV, XLVII and LXXXIII display this order.

PLATES XXVIII and XXX illustrate how forcefully the artist has been able to draw animals spaced in flowers and plants in between, as if to suggest a world of make-belief and ignore the apparent proportional improbabilities. Plate XXX, representing a bull, is a splendid example of how conversant the artist was with the technique of foreshortening.

As in other instances, plate VIII shows expertness of the artist in mingling a portrayal of what is seemingly naturalistic, together with totally imaginary elements. A little dwarf is cradled amongst flowers, as if seated on a swing. Not only in the rhythmic lines does he become a part of the flower-world, but also his right hand merges with flowers, and the end of his loin-cloth becomes floral, drawing him close to the world of nature. Here the little being blends beautifully into the decorative foliage and expresses at the same time a genuine *joi de vivre* in being one with nature. Panels as on plates XVI, LXXVII and LXXXIII, with their grotesque and weird creatures, exhibit a remarkable charm. Many of the ornaments which we find on the ceilings of Ajanta are still alive. They have been absorbed into the different branches of Indian artistic expressions and are esteemed even today.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> When one is about to pronounce a general rule about the Ajanta paintings one has to face exceptions; one of them is plate XLI, ceiling of Cave 1, which has been much disputed. The scene, entitled 'a Bacchanalian scene', presents a strange amalgamation of physiognomies, dresses and caps—indicating a foreign origin. The panel itself looks like an enlarged miniature, like a court-scene of the Iranian school.

<sup>2</sup> These traditional patterns have been preserved in *ālpānās*, jewelry, brocades and borders of conventional *sāris*, dresses, etc.

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It has been the conservator's headache to secure the paintings from falling off the walls, as they are prone to do during the monsoon when they are exposed to excessive humidity. In the twenties two Italian experts applied a kind of shellac-varnish over them for preservation. The result was not so satisfactory (below, page 56). One of the drawbacks was that the coat was often applied thick, changing the original colour measurably. Even though specialists have later tried to remove shellac from the paintings, they have not always been able to restore the authentic hue, as shellac has penetrated into the pores. While looking at the plates we should be aware of such transformation, which, together with the wear of time, has given the six basic colours a patina which has followed a pattern. Shellac applied on pure red ochre has made red look deeper, but when put on red mixed with yellow has become dull. On thick blue it has turned almost black but on thin blue appears greenish. Shellac on pure *terra verde* (green) looks dark-green, but on green mixed with yellow has become olive. Applied on ochre-yellow it has turned chrome-yellow, but when it is on white the white has become pale ochre-yellow or like egg-shell in tone. Shellac is less harmful when it is applied on a colour which is already thick, as also if the shellac-layer is thinly applied. But when thickly applied on thin colours, the colours take a shine which gives an unintended coat of glossiness. The changes induced by shellac have, in the most, affected the original white colour and particularly the beautiful whites of the ceilings which, perhaps, was used so liberally in order to reflect light on the darker painted walls. Cf. plates XVI, XXV, LXVII and LXXXIII.

ALTHOUGH the drawback of shellac coat is self-evident, it has its compensation. Apart from carrying preservative qualities, it has imposed a unanimous overtone, influencing the character and tonal effects of each colour; but it has also bathed the walls in warmth, a kind of dark glow—as it were the fading sunlight in abstraction.

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MULTIPURPOSE is the use of colours—creative of forms, perspective and rhythm. As is usually done, the colours have been applied in a certain order so that the foreground appears brighter and the background darker. But this effect has again been modified by white flowers and petals being strewn all over, so as to regain the link and continuous colour-dialogue. A look at the plates will initiate us into their subtleties. Since drawing was the first step in the creation of murals, it maintained its predominance; colour was for formative and embellishing needs. The precise choice of a colour was prescribed by the figurative meaning of the object and was mostly rendered in pigments such as we find them in nature. Colour used for backwash of the 'canvas' was evenly laid, without much nuance, in order to bind together the different spatial areas into one united plane, excepting when flowers and other details were superimposed for breaking the monotony. Cf. plate XXXII, where the dark-green back-drop presents the negative form in contrast with the reddish-brown and yellow colours of the positive form of the central figure. Plate XXIV is another example of the artistic interplay between the bright and the toned-down colours of negative and positive forms. Such contrasts were resorted to for giving a silhouettish effect so that the figures would stand out. Cf. also plate VI.

THE application of colours in the foreground used for creating human figures is more complex. The human form appears in three dimensions and the search for form compelled the artist

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to explore the textural possibilities of colour-application, for giving convexity to the surface. Brush-strokes which play an important role in contemporary painting was not perhaps in vogue in the days of Ajanta. The impress of brush-strokes becomes evident only in selected instances—when delineating body-contours, facial details or in elaborate coiffures as also in the ornamentation of the ceilings. There they excel, but when it comes to applying colour for colour's sake, the traces of the brush in action become invisible; transgression between colour and colour becomes fused and the surface smooth, as if the wall itself was the palette for mixing of colours. Or, could it be that time has blurred the edges of the original techniques and the textures too have become unduly overgrown, the paint having been screened with countless cracks?

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IN spite of the dilapidation of the murals, or just because of it, we can now spy on their technique with profit. Since it was one of the axioms of Indian art that the highest art was to conceal the technicalities of art,<sup>1</sup> the artist took pride in not exposing his secret. This accounts for the fact that we have no reliable written records giving us sufficient data. Nor has anyone yet been able to decipher the principles of composition which, supposedly, must have guided the artist in painting huge wall-spaces in continuous conformity and harmonious artistic expression. The question arises—did the artist work on a master-plan? When the first outline was drawn on the white plaster—was it a direct transference of a vision, or was it a less spontaneous act of copying from a given key-sketch? Our intuition would make us feel that the walls were too big for instantaneous conception.

WE know that the themes rendered were narrations after the Jātaka-stories of the Buddhist texts or other Buddhist scenes. But the sequence of events was not always strictly in conformity with that of the written versions. Although both the media, literary and the murals, have attempted at evaluating man in relation to mankind as also the divine—the world of painting exhibits greater details and nature too plays a larger role than in their literary counterpart. The composition of the themes and the composition of paintings were not worked out in as close a manner as one would expect. Very often we find that the parallel-running friezes start on the lower and continue in the upper part of the mural. At times the story begins on the left, proceeding right, but often the other way round. If one is not already familiar with the Jātaka-stories, from the pictorial representation alone one will not be able to discern the sequence. Such seeming incoherence may remind us that the painter was an artist above all, lending himself to artistic spontaneity despite his distinctive role as a religious interpreter.

SUPPOSING this was the case, the problem of compositional principles still remains unanswered. Certain scholars<sup>2</sup> have tried to group apparently similar compositions and attempted at labeling them as 'circular type of grouping', 'connecting-link compositions' and the like. These speculations are interesting, but the walls have been very ungenerous by way of giving any

<sup>1</sup> The equivalent Latin expression is: *ars est celare artem*, 'it is true art to conceal art'.

<sup>2</sup> Jeannine Auboyer, 'Composition and perspective at Ajanta', *Art and Letters, India and Pakistan*, New Series, XXII, number 1 (1948), pages 20-28.

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systematic response to researchers. The artist might have as well painted wilfully, each time anew from the force of his inspiration.

SURELY the world of Ajanta, secure and self-contained, bears the stamp of unison commended as if by 'faith'; but when it comes to accepting the continuity of technical excellence, it is baffling. There must have been some authoritative texts describing the relationship between concept and form, symbols and their visual representation. The *Vishnudharmottara*, an early treatise on Indian painting and image-making, was probably compiled in the seventh century and may be roughly contemporary of the last of Ajanta paintings. It makes us 'acquainted with the theories prevalent at the time of the full maturity of their practice.'<sup>1</sup> In this text we find reference to a number of professional terms (technical concepts) such as *pramāna* (proportions), *kshaya*, and *vṛiddhi* (both meaning foreshortening—decrease and increase) and *vartanā* (modelling or shading).<sup>2</sup>

PLATE XLVIII demonstrates the use of dots (*bindu*)—a kind of shading achieved by stippling. This technique implies the use of a thin brush to prick the surface of the painting with innumerable tiny touches. It is a technique similar to that of the pointilists, although the Ajanta artist did not use different colours, as did the impressionists, but only the different shades of the same colour, mostly brown. Stippling was taken recourse to on the edges of a form, with darker colours upon lighter background, to round it off. In terms of the concentration of 'dots', this process of shading gives modelling effects to body-parts by degrees. The flying angels on the ceiling of the inner shrine, Cave 2 (plate XLVIII), show this technique at its best. Here the chubbiness of the limbs of the child-angel is painted with the same love and understanding of a child's bodily characteristics as we find in Rubens, centuries later. Except for the very earliest paintings at Ajanta (cf. plate I), the above-mentioned form of shading was abundantly used, though it may not be too visible in the plates due to the finesse of its application. Plates II, III, VI, VIII, XXIV, LIII and others are illustrative of the point.

ANOTHER technique closely related to the former was the use of highlight (cf. plates XIII, XXVI and XL). As already stated above (page 45), the artist achieved the effect of highlight by white patches (now yellowish on account of the changes of colour induced by shellae) appearing on the chin, breasts, arms, legs or wherever an elevation of form was desired. Both these techniques served artistic purposes only and operated independently of any recognizable source of light.

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IN his conception of perspective too did the artist show originality and technique different from that we find in Europe. Often we find the Ajanta artist designing heightened perspective where he builds up different planes and brings them together, so that at times they are telescoped into each other. Here we have no fixed focal point which leads the eye from larger to smaller objects in recession, nor any perspective in depth drawing the eye towards a

<sup>1</sup> Stella Kramrisch, *The Vishnudharmottaram* (Calcutta, 1928), pages 5 and 14.

<sup>2</sup> See also Priyabala Shah, *Vishnudharmottara-Purāna*, third *khaṇḍa*, I (Baroda, 1958), pages 144-45; II (Baroda, 1960), pages 125-28.—Editor.

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vanishing-point or a horizon-line. On the contrary, one and the same scene is often seen simultaneously from numerous angles. A kind of multiple perspective has been introduced where different objects are perceived, as if they were seen from within the panel; we might even say as seen by the characters on the 'canvas' itself. While pavilions and pillars are mostly seen from below or at eye-level, roofs, trees, plants and flowers are seen as if from above. Beholders not used to this kind of varied and fanciful representation may find it disorganized and difficult to configurate. On the other hand, one should not assume that the artist relied on this technique not knowing what he did. Because, in effect this rotating perspective of multiple vision gives the spectator a feeling of being one with the scene, as if he himself is a partner in the general commotion. This was an artifice allied to the methods of the cubists, who also aimed at presenting the spectator with several aspects of an object at the same time. Long before the cubists had evolved their theories, the Ajanta artist did contrive similar principles.

THE artist preferred not to break the architectural flatness of the painted surface by introducing a dimension of depth, for creating an illusion of space larger than the physical frame of the walls. We should not, however, infer that no attempt was made at depicting three-dimensional forms. The only difference is that he reversedly achieved a three-dimensional effect by means of shade and highlight, where the forms instead of being projected in the depth were made forthcoming. On the other hand, he did introduce another kind of dimension: through painting concepts and ideas rather than representational scenes he created a spatial dimension which we may call the 'mental space'.

WHAT the spectator perceived depended as much on his inner self as on the paintings. His own potential abilities were to provide the stimulus for plunging deeper into the meaning of those visionary images he found on the walls. It was an art to be perceived by those who were to be initiated: and the paintings served as the reminder of something else. That something was the Buddhist faith in certain eternal values expressed in countless ways. These fine overtones were suggestive of and associated with an archetypal thought-pattern lying dormant in the personality of the beholder and deeply rooted in his consciousness, conditioned by the refinements of his own culture.

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EVERYTHING said and seen, Ajanta belongs to the past. The perspective that epitomized its vision is gone. In its cradle the image that was taking shape in the conception of Ajanta inspired the believers not to create art for art's sake, but to give their lives over to religion. Hieratic art was the result. The belief that making of images led to heaven—not the making of likeness to man—that which accords with the scriptures and canons is beautiful—not that which pleases individual fancy—became the token of faith of the time. Such a trend is not to be wholly regarded as Eastern or Western, for ecclesiastical art was also very much in vogue in the Christian world of the past and basked in Papal patronage. We can only describe it as the art of the time. Religio-centric art no longer rules the creative genius; with the passage of time it has been dissociated from the basic emotional fervour. Therefore, now when we look at Ajanta, try to evaluate the zeal that nurtured its art, we wonder at it with a

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detachment which is inherent in the modernity of today. Our objective mind seeks artistic excellence alone, and since Ajanta has it in ample measures we cherish its intrinsic worth and basic humanism, notwithstanding the fact that the dedicated ones may resent the loss of those faith-tinged values which once inspired the artist to create. Dilapidation and deterioration of the material apart, what is left at Ajanta has stood the test of time and stands invulnerable to the critical eye of the twentieth century.

# THE MURALS: THEIR COMPOSITION & TECHNIQUE

**T**HE MURAL paintings have been examined in great detail with a view to determining their composition and technique and the material employed in their execution. All the factors which constitute their material—the carrier, the ground, the pigments and the binding-medium—and the state of their preservation have been studied carefully in order to ascertain the causes of their deterioration and the method required for their proper chemical treatment and preservation.

## THE CARRIER

**T**HE inner surface of the walls of the caves, cut into the hard and compact volcanic trap-rock or basalt, characterized by vesicles and amygdaloidal cavities, constitutes the carrier for the plaster on which the pigments were laid. The surface of the carrier is rough and uneven, with deep furrows and chisel-marks produced in the course of excavation of the caves by the slow process of hammer-and-chisel strokes. This itself was an advantage, as a tooth was provided to the plaster laid on the surface. Although the inner surface is more or less free from weathering, yet it cannot be said that the climatic and environmental factors have been inoperative. In fact, in spite of a very low porosity and an inappreciable permeability of the rock, rain-water has gained access into the interior of several caves through natural seams and vents and cracks in the rock-surface exposed to the outside atmosphere. Nevertheless, the rock has withstood the onslaught of elements very well indeed, and there is scarcely any salt-efflorescence on the painted surface, though the movement of water over the paintings has caused considerable damage to them. The carrier is still very sound and stable and is relatively free from moisture. The bond between the carrier and the plaster has, therefore, remained firm except in small areas where it has become loose; in such cases the detachment is not due to any displacement of the latter but definitely to internal environmental factors.

## THE GROUND

**T**HE ground of the paintings is composed of mud-plaster containing about 10 to 12 per cent of combined water and organic matter, such as vegetable-fibres, paddy-husk, grass and other fibrous material of organic origin, and rock-grit or sand. Silica is present to the extent of about 60 per cent, and iron and alumina account for 27 per cent. Lime and magnesia are present to the extent of 2 to 3 per cent. It is, therefore, clear that the plaster is made of a ferruginous earth, reinforced with rock-grit or sand and fibrous vegetable-material. There is hardly any lime in it, but traces of a whitish layer on its surface just below the pigment-layer indicate the presence of lime, kaolin or gypsum. Being mainly of mud, the ground is soft and porous and does not possess the natural strength and durability of common lime-plaster.

**T**HE ground was prepared by the application of two coats of plaster on the carrier. The first coat was coarse in texture with a considerable amount of fibrous vegetable-material

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and rock-grit or sand. Evidently, the unevenness of the chiselled rock-surface was rectified by the application of this coat. This was then made smooth by another layer of mud and ferruginous earth, again mixed with fine rock-powder or sand and fine fibrous vegetable-material. The surface was finally rendered smooth by the application of a thin layer of limewash, which was then painted over.

THE ground can thus generally be described as constituted of three layers—the pigments, fine plaster and coarse plaster—with two distinct lines of junctions, and this is confirmed by microscopic examination of the painted stucco. The paint-layer is generally about 0·1 mm. in thickness. The underlying layer of fine plaster varies in thickness from cave to cave and ranges in thickness between 2 and 3 mm. The thickness of the coarse plaster below varies over a wide range, being primarily determined on a particular spot by the inequalities in the rock-surface. While the exact thickness of the ground in a cave is of little consequence, it seems that great care was exercised by the artist in laying the ground, for, although almost completely free from lime, it still had a degree of compactness and hardness which rendered it fit to receive the brushwork. The fibrous material incorporated in the plaster for imparting to it a degree of strength has, however, proved to be a serious drawback, for it has decayed partly on account of depredations by insect-pest and partly on account of the natural decomposition of the vegetable-matter under conditions of high humidity and temperature. A study of the grain-size of the particles constituting the plaster has shown that the mixture of ferruginous mud and gritty rock-powder and sand was very carefully gauged and that the grains of silica possessed marked angularity, which has considerably contributed to the firmness and compactness of the plaster. Due to the absence of interlocking rounded grains do not produce a consolidated plaster.

### THE PIGMENTS

THE paintings show a wide variety of pigments. The important pigments are yellow, red, blue, white, black and green, along with mixtures of these in various shades. All these, with the exception of black, are mineral in origin: the red and yellow pigments are red and yellow ochres and lamp-black was used for black. For white were used kaolin, lime and gypsum and for green glauconite. Lapis lazuli, used for blue, alone was imported, as it has not been reported from the neighbourhood; all other pigments, viz. white, red, yellow and green, were locally available as residual products of the volcanic rock. There is hardly any evidence of the use of copper compounds such as malachite for green and azurite for blue. *Terra verde*, mineralogically called glauconite, is a green complex ferrous silicate and is a secondary product of weathering of the basalt. Ochreous clays, such as red and yellow ochres, were also evidently obtained from the clayey products of weathering of the rock. The presence of such other pigments as verdigris, vermilion, cinnabar, orpiment, realgar or red lead has not been established on the basis of chemical, microchemical and spot analysis. While there is no clear evidence for the use of any organic colouring-material, whether or not it was used remains an open question, since even if it was used it must have perished, leaving behind no evidence of its possible prior existence.

IN order to determine the technique of the painting-process employed at Ajanta, it has been necessary to examine the pigments for detecting the cementing-material or adhesives used



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for binding the pigments to the ground. The pigments of the paintings are easily softened by water. This is indicative of the existence of a water-soluble binding-medium in the pigment-layer. A clear proof of the existence of glue or gum as the binding-medium has been furnished in some cases by a careful chemical and microscopic analysis of the pigments. Chemical analysis shows that animal glue was probably employed.

### THE TECHNIQUE

THE condition of the pigments, the flaking of colours, the lifting up of paint-film in the form of cups and the blistering-effect—all these show that the technique of painting at Ajanta was not that of *fresco buono*, which is not affected by water since the pigments are not softened by it. Moreover, the ground of a true fresco-painting must be lime-plaster and the painting should be carried out on the plaster while wet, with mineral pigments compatible with lime and ground only in plain water without the incorporation of any binding-medium. At Ajanta polished sections of the painted stucco clearly show that the pigments stand out as a thin but distinct layer on the ground. No diffusion of colours into the body of the plaster is noticed; the pigments are neatly superimposed on the surface as a thin but distinct layer without permeating into the body of the plaster. It is evident that it was only the organic binding-medium, such as gum and glue, that held the pigments firmly to the ground. The binding-medium has largely perished in the course of centuries partly on account of autoxidation and partly due to the depredations by insect-pest. The bond between the pigments and plaster has thus now become weak, and this has resulted in the flaking of pigments. At the same time, as stated above, the examination of a large number of painted stuccos from different caves has shown that in some cases glue is still present in the pigments in detectable quantities.

IN short, the absence of lime-plaster at Ajanta, the presence of glue in some cases as demonstrated by analysis, coupled with the possibility of a complete oxidation and deterioration of glue, and the characteristic flaking of the pigments would definitely point to a tempera technique.

## THE MURALS : THEIR PRESERVATION

**T**HE PROBLEM of preservation of the paintings has been receiving constant attention of conservators. The causes of their deterioration have been studied and suitable methods have been evolved to arrest further decay.

### CAUSES OF DETERIORATION

**T**HE causes of deterioration of the murals are both external and internal. Among the external causes may be mentioned wide variations in temperature and humidity, atmospheric pollution, such as dust, dirt, soot, smoke and tarry and greasy accretions, deleterious effects of hot gases from the fires and oil-lamps lit inside the caves in the past, accretions of droppings of birds and bats, insect-nests, seepage of moisture and water-stains, growth of mildew and human vandalism. Dust and dirt which settled down on the painted surfaces have now become hard and firm and form a translucent to opaque film on the paintings; smoke and tar have caused the accumulation of thick layers of soot, tarry matter, grease and oil.

**A**MONG the internal causes of deterioration are development of cracks, decay of binding-medium, alligating of pigment-layers, chemical changes in the pigments, fading of colours, softening, friability of the plaster, movement and bulging of the plaster and flaking of pigments and priming—the last two caused by violent changes in humidity and temperature and in turn encouraging the external factors of the growth of mildew and breeding of insect-pest.

**D**UE to prolonged desiccation and action of atmospheric oxygen and moisture and the depredations of insect-pest, the binding-medium originally present in the pigments has lost its adhesive property or has been completely or partially destroyed, with the result that the pigments have developed a marked tendency to flake off. Unless this loss of pigments is effectively stopped the paintings are bound to deteriorate and to be irretrievably damaged.

### PRESERVATION : PRIOR TO 1953

**B**ETWEEN the years 1920 and 1922, at the invitation of the Hyderabad Government, an expert *restaurateur* Signor L. Ceceoni, accompanied by his assistant, Count Orsini, conserved some of the paintings in Caves 1, 2, 10, 16 and 17. The work was continued in subsequent years by the local staff of the Archaeological Department of Hyderabad. Ceceoni's method consisted of a liberal use of shellac in alcohol and gum dammar in turpentine as fixatives of pigments. Where the colour was seen to be peeling off, a very dilute solution of gum dammar was applied, the process being repeated until the pigments were fixed. Finally, the surface was gently pressed down with a spatula. For the removal of old darkened varnish,<sup>1</sup> alcohol

<sup>1</sup>It seems that in the course of copying the paintings (above, page 3) Griffiths had laid varnish on the paintings 'with the double object of brightening up the details of the paintings and of protecting them against damp', *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department of His Exalted Highness the Nizam's Dominions, 1920-21* (Calcutta, 1923), page 15. Its disastrous effect was almost immediate, for, when Maindron visited Ajanta in 1884, 'the varnish had flaked off from all parts, carrying with it the painting, the fragments of which were accumulated on the ground,' Mauricc Maindron, *L'art indienne* (Paris, 1898), page 148. In 1919, A. Foucher, quoted in the above-mentioned *Annual Report, 1917-18* (Calcutta 1919), page 12 note, complained of the 'varnish and smoke, which have done so much to darken their colour'.—Editor.

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was tried either singly or with turpentine. Cecconi also favoured the use of very dilute caustic soda, alcohol and a few drops of hydrochloric acid. Though he had never tried ammonia before, he found that it worked satisfactorily at Ajanta.

For fixing detached patches of paintings Cecconi used the following methods:

- (1) injection of casein-lime, where the gap was narrow;
- (2) filling with plaster of Paris or lime, fine pazzolana, where the cavity was large;
- (3) fixing of nails in dangerous parts for supporting the *rinzaffato* (coarse plaster);
- (4) strengthening of the *rinzaffato* by sticking strips of linen on the surface with hot gelatin solution and removal of the linen by means of hot water after the parts had been secured to the wall; and
- (5) liberal use of unbleached shellac dissolved in alcohol for general preservation.

### PRESERVATION : FROM 1953

THE hope that by these measures 'the deterioration of the "frescoes" has been stopped for at least a century to come', was too optimistic, for when, as a result of post-Independence integration, the Archaeological Survey of India took charge of the Ajanta caves as monuments of national importance, it was observed that all the deteriorative factors were in full operation. Dust, dirt, old varnish and other accretions such as insect-nests, insect-wax, smoke, tarry matter and grease had brought about a marked change in the optical values of the paintings. Percolation of rain-water had not altogether stopped. The plaster on the rock-surface had lost its hold at many places. The pigment-layers had become dry and showed a tendency to peel off. In addition, the coats of shellac had undergone aerial oxidation and had become translucent, thus changing the tonal values of the paintings. Remedial action was therefore called for.

WHEREVER there was evidence of plaster being loose or pigments showing a tendency to flake off, a first-aid treatment was carried out with a view to saving the paintings from further damage. The loose plaster was consolidated and fixed to the wall and broken edges of plaster filleted on a large scale. In addition, the treatment consisted of consolidation of loose plaster and paint-layer and fixation of loose pigments to the ground by surface-impregnation with a transparent fixative such as polyvinyl acetate or polymethyl methacrylate. Work has been concentrated in Caves 16 and 17.

WHERE the condition of paintings and the state of pigment-layers allowed, dust, dirt, cobwebs and other loose surface-accretions were removed mechanically with the help of feather brushes, soft camel-hair brushes, foot-bellows and small vacuum-cleaners after the fixing of the loose pigment-films to the ground. Insect-wax, oil, grease, tarry matter and smoke presented extremely difficult problems and extensive field-trials and laboratory-tests had to be carried out for evolving satisfactory techniques for the elimination of these injurious accretions. The choice of a suitable solvent or a mixture of solvents was extremely important, as on it depended the successful elimination of the accretions and the consolidation and strengthening of paint-layers without any loss of pigments or any other damage. Such reagents, solvents and detergents as ethyl alcohol, methyl alcohol, naphtha, ethylene glycol monoethyl ether,

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diacetone, alcohol, triethanolamine, butyl alcohol, turpentine and butyl acetate have been found very effective.

ON the basis of experience gained out of work on paintings at monuments of lesser importance, the problem of elimination of the darkened shellac was taken up at Ajanta and several panels have been successfully treated and preserved without in any manner affecting the paintings or causing any damage. Various organic solvents and their mixtures in different proportions for eliminating natural resins were tried. Morpholine, acetone, methyl-ethyl ketone, butyl alcohol, ether, triethanolamine, dibutyl phthalate, etc., are some of the reagents which have been found successful.

As a result of experiments it was observed that the treatment with low-boiling solvents gave rise to chalkiness on the paintings. This clue led to further experiments. By combining the physico-chemical properties of different organic solvents, it has been possible to develop mixtures of solvents which remove the natural resin without giving rise to blanching. The employment of warm solvents for the elimination of the shellac by a process of refluxing has not been considered safe, as local heating of painted surfaces is not desirable. Accordingly, mixtures in different proportions of chemicals already mentioned are employed for the elimination of shellac.

It was later on found that better results could be obtained by eliminating acetone, butyl alcohol and ammonia from the mixtures. The proportion of the reagents in the mixtures has to be varied from place to place according to the individual requirement of the paintings. Wherever grease is present, a few drops of ammonium hydroxide are used in the mixtures.

THE application of filter-paper moistened with the solvents gives better results and is a safer method, because it avoids all rough contact with the delicate painted surfaces. Soft camel-hair brushes and cotton-wool are, therefore, used only in exceptional cases in addition to filter-paper. The method of dry friction is not advisable, as such a drastic method may cause scraping and smudging of the painted surfaces and may result in serious damage. The filter-paper technique eliminates all friction and causes no damage to the delicate surfaces. In fact, for the elimination of accretions abrasives are not at all used and all friction is avoided.

FOR the preservation of chemically-treated painted surfaces, polyvinyl acetate in toluene, ethylene dichloride and ethyl alcohol mixtures are employed in 3 to 5 per cent strength. Polymethyl methacrylate was limitedly tried, but it was found that under the tropical conditions of high temperature and high humidity prevailing at Ajanta the material, which is normally readily soluble in toluene, acetone and similar organic solvents, tended to become insoluble after exposure to atmosphere. In view of this and its marked tendency to attract dust, it has not been employed in the fixing of the pigments. Instead, surface-impregnation with thin dilute solutions of polyvinyl acetate is carried out. Polybutyl methacrylate is a better preservative than polyvinyl acetate, but its non-availability precludes its use.

THE use of N-hydroxymethyl nylon, called soluble nylon, as a surface-fixative and adhesive was also considered in view of its non-yellowing properties and its freedom from contractile

## *THE MURALS : THEIR PRESERVATION*

forces in thin films, but as the result of large-scale work of preservation of painted surfaces with this resin is not available, and it is not known how it will behave under the climatic conditions of Ajanta, it has not been tried. The same considerations have ruled out the use of sodium salt of carboxy methyl-cellulose as an adhesive for securing loose plaster and priming to the ground and the plaster respectively. Epoxy resins have, for similar reasons, not been considered suitable as consolidants. Moreover, these materials are not available in India. Cavities are filled in with a thick solution of polyvinyl acetate mixed with fine sand, introduced into the gap with a hypodermic syringe. Plaster of Paris is also used in some cases.

**A**PART from chemical cleaning and preservation it was essential to secure crumbling edges of broken painted plaster to the ground by careful filleting, with the well-tried technique used on Indian mural paintings. In addition, gaps, holes and cavities in the painted surface are suitably filled in, leaving a neutral tint so as not to produce any obtrusive contrast.

**D**ETAILED photographic records, black-and-white as well as in colour, are prepared of the paintings in different stages of treatment.

**S**UCH optico-photographic documentations as ultraviolet photography and infrared photography, which are necessary not only for recording the condition of the paintings but for bringing to light such hidden features as cannot be perceived by the naked eye, for detecting restoration and overpainting, for determining the condition of the pigment-layers and for diagnosing the factors of deterioration, could not be attempted in the absence of necessary equipment.

**T**HE photographic documentation is supplemented by drawings and copies of the paintings for indicating the extent of the existing painted surface and for reproducing such paintings as are well-preserved.

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PLATES IN COLOUR

I TO LXXXV

PLATE I

Part of a scene of the worship of the Bodhi-tree.

A king and his queen proceed with their followers to worship the Bodhi-tree (not included in the plate). This is one of the earliest paintings of Ajanta.

Cf. fig. 1.

38×28 cm.

Cave 10.



PLATE II

Part of a scene of the worship of Buddha.

A devout monk with a flower and a handled casket (incense-burner ?) in hand kneels beside the leg of an enormous rock-cut Buddha. The sizes of the pygmy and the colossus bespeak their relative importance.

65 × 37 cm.

Cave 6.



### PLATE III

Part of the story of the Conversion of Nanda.

Prince Nanda, newly wedded to Janapada-kalyāṇī (an uncommon but meaningful name: the 'Fortune of the Country'), also called Sundarī, was taken away to the monastery by Buddha and was ordained—so goes the story. When a messenger returns with the crown of Nanda (left part of the plate), indicating Nanda's renunciation of the world, the wife swoons in utter misery. The heart-rending reality is shared by the other characters in the panel: even the peacock, the pale flowers and the mute pillars are in tune with the *leit-motiv*—in communion with the lady. This masterpiece is commonly known as the 'Dying Princess'.

1·02 m. × 82 cm.

Cave 16.





PLATE IV

Part of a panel representing the Preaching Buddha.

A celestial carrying flowers on a lotus-leaf glides down the air to worship Buddha (now disappeared).

29 × 27 cm.

Cave 16.



PLATE V

Part of ceiling-decoration.

34×30 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE VI

Part of a scene probably representing the story of  
the Conversion of Nanda.

This plate and the one following it probably represent a free rendering of the story of the Conversion of Nanda (for the story see explanation of pl. III). The other parts of the scene (not included in the plate) depict a simply-clad person standing at the palace-gate and undoing his ornaments. He is probably Nanda on his way to assuming monkhood. The tidings are brought by a hurrying menial to a princess, probably Nanda's wife Janapada-kalyāṇī, conversing with her maid (the latter not included in the plate).

Cf. fig. 2.

37 × 33 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE VII

Part of a scene probably representing the story of  
the Conversion of Nanda.

For the likely story see explanation of pl. VI. A maid  
anxiously tries to revive her mistress, probably Janapada-  
kalyāṇī, swooning on a couch (not included in the plate)  
by pouring water over her out of a pitcher.

36×26 cm.

Cave 1.





PLATE VIII  
Part of ceiling-decoration.  
56×43 cm.  
Cave 1.



PLATE IX

Part of the story of the *Śaṅkhapāla-Jātaka*.

A lady listens in rapt attention to a sermon delivered by a king of Magadha, turned an ascetic, in the presence of a Bodhisattva, born as Śaṅkhapāla, the lord of the serpents (not included in the plate).

Cf. fig. 3.

44 × 36 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XI

Part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. X. A show of dance and music has been arranged by Sīvalī in her attempt to keep Mahājanaka tied to worldly life.

Cf. fig. 4.

67 × 48 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XII

Part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. X. Mahājanaka goes out of his palace on an elephant to attend a saint's sermon.

Cf. fig. 4.

72 × 46 cm.

Cave 1.





PLATE XIII

Part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. X. Here Mahājanaka announces his firm decision to retire as a recluse. A maid standing behind looks dejected.

Cf. fig. 5.

49 × 39 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XIV

Part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. X. Sivali and her retinue listen to Mahājanaka in bewilderment.

Cf. fig. 5.

67 × 54 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XV

Part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. X. This group forms part of the procession of Mahājanaka forsaking his palace (not included in the plate). Rows of geese are depicted on the garment worn by the lady in front—a fashion also referred to in contemporary literature.

Cf. fig. 5.

47 × 35 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XVI

Part of ceiling-decoration.

95×80 cm.

Cave 1.





PLATE XVII

Probably part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the story probably represented on pls. XVII to XX see explanation of pl. X. On this plate the ladies of the palace, with simple floral garlands, pay homage to an ascetic, probably Mahājanaka himself. Their simplicity, along with that of the ascetic, presents a study in contrast to the lavish decoration of the palace.

Cf. fig. 6.

1·09 m × 78 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XVIII

Probably part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the probable story see explanations of pls. X and XVII. This plate is the detail of the left portion of pl. XVII.

Cf. fig. 6.

55 × 38 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XIX

Probably part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the probable story see explanations of pls. X and XVII. This is a portion of a scene of the lustration of a prince, probably Mahājanaka. The attendants, an odd assortment including a dwarf, serve the king at his royal toilet (pl. XX). Excitement pervades the scene, but each person performs his assignment in an orderly manner. Mendicants wait outside the pavilion for the customary alms.

Cf. fig. 6.

1.09 m. × 84 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XX

Probably part of the story of the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka*.

For the probable story see explanations of pls. X and XVII. A prince, probably Mahājanaka, seated under a gorgeously-ornamented pavilion, is being given a ceremonial bath before coronation with holy water poured over him from decorated pitchers by two attendants, while three maids wait in attendance. The proper synthesis of the details and the characters is subdued enough to highlight the central topic—the royal lustration.

Cf. fig. 6.

1.11 m. × 74 cm.

Cave 1.





PLATE XXI

Probably part of the story of the *Ummagga-Jātaka*.

The four severed heads on a salver may be those of the four royal counsellors who pretended to be clever but were outwitted by young *Mahaushadha*, a Bodhisattva, and incurred the king's displeasure. (But the story does not say that they were beheaded.) If the identification is correct, the young person looking at the heads may be *Mahaushadha*, with his wife *Amarā* at his back. Such ghastly scenes are seldom represented at Ajanta.

Cf. fig. 6.

70 × 51 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXII

Part of the panel of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi.

Pls. XXII to XXIV represent parts of the noble and consonantly extensive panel of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi ('the one who holds a lotus in his hand'), depicted to the left of the entrance to the antechamber fronting the enshrined Buddha, as an attendant of Buddha himself. On this plate a *gandharva*-couple is watching the Bodhisattva (pl. XXIV) from a hill-abode.

Cf. fig. 7.

69 × 59 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXIII

Part of the panel of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi.

For the context see explanation of pl. XXII. A couple of *kinaras*, celestial musicians, plays on instruments—the male on a lute and the female on cymbals—in honour of the Bodhisattva (pl. XXIV).

Cf. fig. 7.

79 × 61 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXIV

Part of the panel of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi.

For the context see explanation of pl. XXII. And here is Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi himself—the focal figure of the elaborate panel. He towers over all his paraphernalia; his head is held high among the cloudy hills. Yet, unconscious of the majestic surroundings, his figure, of peerless grace, dissolves, as it were, in infinite compassion for the living world in sympathy with its miseries and with a promise of deliverance.

Cf. fig. 7.





PLATE XXV

Part of ceiling-decoration.

1·39 × 1·13 m.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXVI

Part of the panel depicting the Assault and  
Temptation by Māra.

Māra, the Evil One, assaulted Buddha who was about to attain Enlightenment. Failing in his attempt, Māra sent his youthful daughters, one of them seen here, to swerve Buddha from the path of virtue.

Cf. fig. 8.

25 × 18 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXVII

Part of the panel depicting the Assault and  
Temptation by Māra.

For the story see explanation of pl. XXVI. Here is  
one more of Māra's daughters, whose bewitching charm  
fails in the mission.

Cf. fig. 8.

50 × 34 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXVIII  
Part of ceiling-decoration.  
35.5 × 30 cm.  
Cave 1.



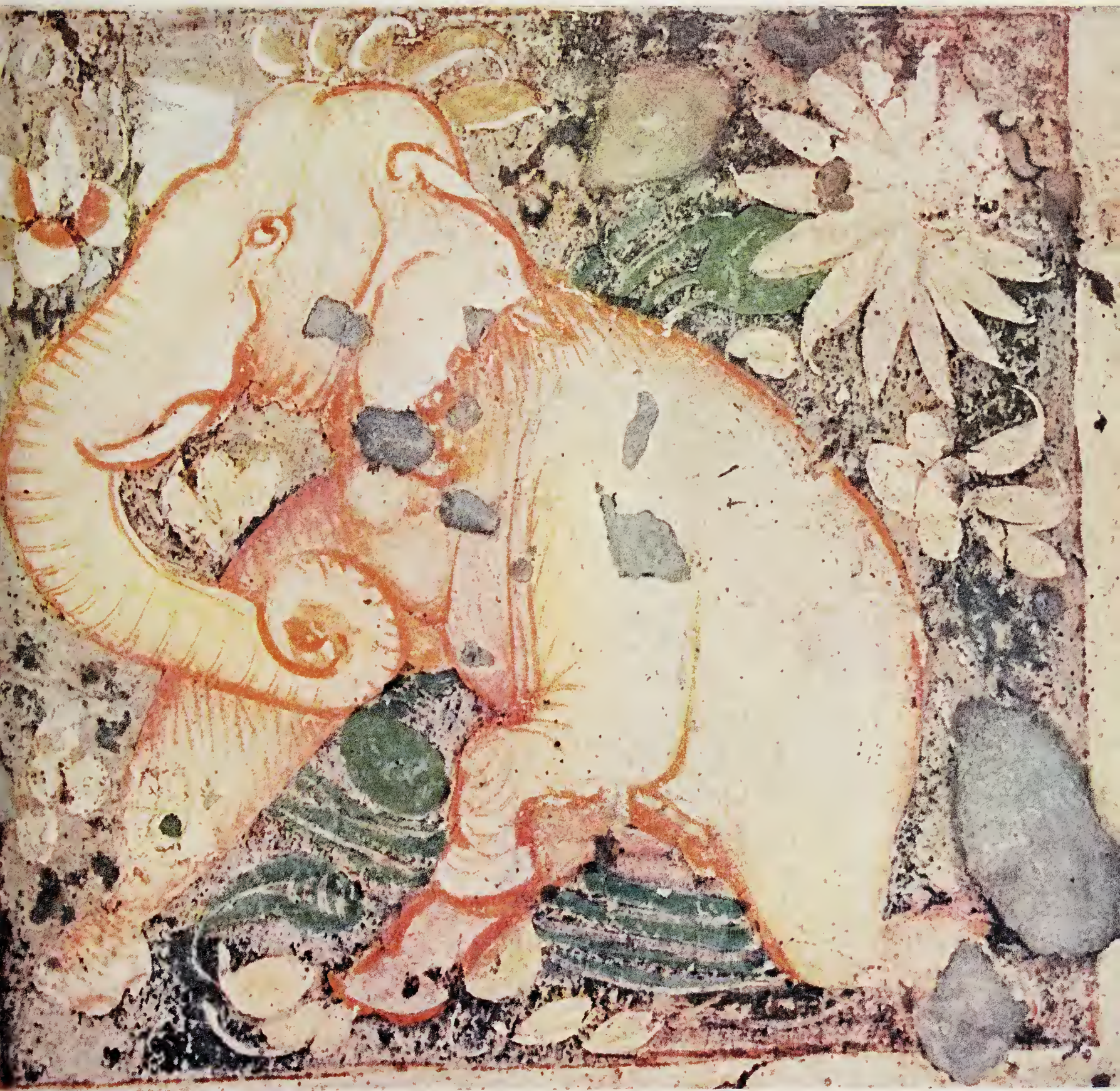


PLATE XXIX

Part of ceiling-decoration.

32 × 29 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXX

Part of ceiling-decoration.

36 × 29 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXXI

Part of the panel of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Depicted to the right of the entrance to the antechamber fronting the enshrined Buddha, thus corresponding to the left panel of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi (pls. XXII to XXIV), is the equally elaborate panel of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, appearing as another attendant of Buddha, also in a hilly setting. On this plate a dark lady of singular charm, appearing in the left lower corner of the panel, accepts lilies offered by another lady (not included in the plate).

Cf. fig. 9.

46 × 39 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXXII

Part of the panel of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

For the context see explanation of pl. XXXI. A royal figure makes an offering of lilies to the Bodhisattva. Though richly attired, his glory fades into insignificance in the presence of the divine Bodhisattva (pl. XXXIII).

Cf. fig. 9.

53 × 50 cm.

Cave 1.





PLATE XXXIII

Part of the panel of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

For the context see explanation of pl. XXXI. Overwhelming his rich surroundings by his personal splendour stands Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, with a Divine Buddha on the crest of his immense bejewelled diadem. His physical charm is at least equalled by the warm spirituality that exudes from his countenance.

Cf. fig. 9.

63 × 42 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXXIV

Part of the story of the *Champeyya-Jātaka*.

Fragments of the story are illustrated on pls. XXXIV to XXXVIII. As a penance Champeyya, a Bodhisattva born as the serpent-lord, allowed himself to be captured by a snake-charmer, who made him dance in the court of Ugrasena, the king of Vārāṇasī. At the request of his wife Sumanā, he was released by Ugrasena, who accompanied him to his serpent-kingdom. There Champeyya delivered a sermon for the edification of his royal guest. On this plate we see the serpent-king seated in his palace in a repentant mood, for he has led a life of enjoyment and has thus strayed from the path of piety. Sumanā, seated beside him, looks at him questioningly. A dwarf brings him a tray of refreshments to cheer him.

Cf. fig. 10.

82 × 60 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXXV

Part of the story of the *Champeyya-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. XXXIV. Here king Ugrasena and his courtiers watch with interest the performances of the captive serpent-king (not included in the plate).

Cf. fig. 10.

60 × 47 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXXVI

Part of the story of the *Champeyya-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. XXXIV. Among those assembled at the royal court to watch the show of the dancing serpent are two provincials in their rustic attire, squatting in peculiar poses at the feet of the king (seen on pl. XXXV) and appreciating the dance with ludicrous gestures.

Cf. fig. 10.

63 × 52 cm.

Cave 1.





PLATE XXXVII

Part of the story of the *Champeyya-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. XXXIV. This is the scene in the royal palace of Champeyya, who, distinguished by a five-hooded cobra over his head, delivers a sermon to the king of Vārāṇasī, seated in front of him. Sumanā, the serpent-queen with a single-hooded cobra, and the royal attendants listen to the sermon.

Cf. fig. 10.

1.50 × 1.04 m.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXXVIII

Part of the story of the *Champeyya-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. XXXIV. This plate is the detail of the right portion of the preceding one.

Cf. fig. 10.

43 × 40 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XXXIX

Part of ceiling-decoration.

30 × 30 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XL

Part of an unidentified story.

A queen seated on a cushion and surrounded by her retinue converses with the king (partly included in the plate). The figures are somewhat disproportionate and are disposed in a mechanical way.

Cf. fig. 11.

89 × 73 cm.

Cave 1.





PLATE XLI

Part of ceiling-decoration.

Ceiling-decorations at Ajanta are usually ornamental, but here is a definite picture which depicts a distinguished foreigner (Persian ?) enjoying his drink and with five attendants, also foreigners, three of them ladies.

77 × 75 cm.

Cave 1.



PLATE XLII

Part of a scene of the worship of the Bodhisattva.

A *yaksha*-couple proceeds to worship the Bodhisattva (not included in the plate). Below are two *kinnara* musicians.

68 × 51 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE XLIII

Part of ceiling-decoration.

Like pl. XLI, here again is a drinking-scene on the ceiling. The participants this time are two comical figures, both in non-Indian attire, one of them with a tuft-like beard and the other with drooping whiskers.

37 × 30 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE XLIV

Part of scenes relating to the birth of Buddha.

Māyā, the would-be mother of Buddha, stands musingly between two pillars. A dwarf attendant standing beside looks up.

Cf. fig. 12.

1·01 m. × 72 cm.

Cave 2.





PLATE XLV

Part of ceiling-decoration.

69 × 62 cm.

Cave 2.

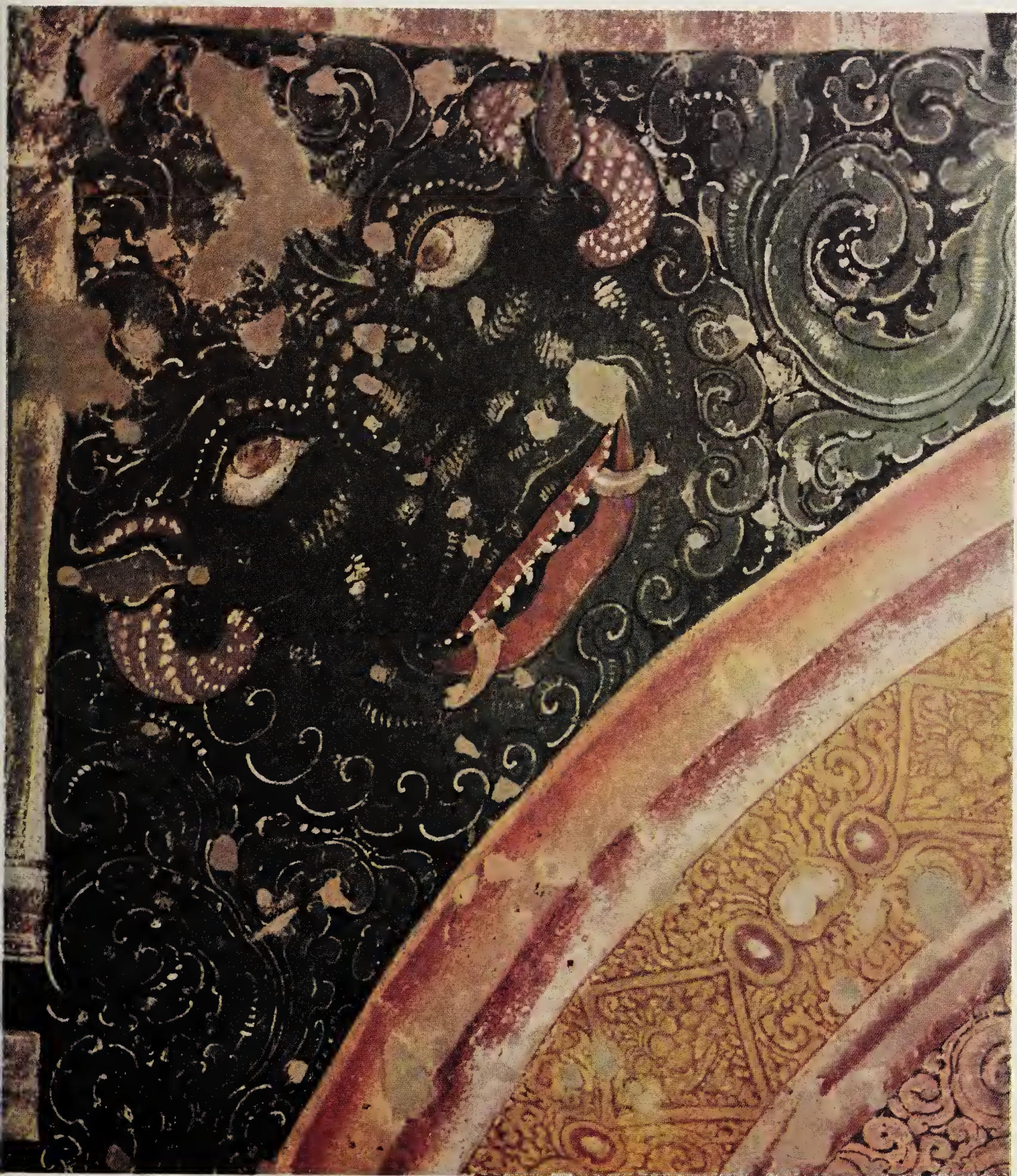


PLATE XLVI

Part of a scene of votaries bringing offerings.

Three ladies are proceeding to the place of worship (not included in the plate). A child sees a toy-duckling on the outstretched palm of the lady on the left and rushes to snatch it.

61 × 49 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE XLVII

Part of ceiling-decoration.

1.07 m. × 89 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE XLVIII  
Part of ceiling-decoration.  
1.09 m. × 83 cm.  
Cave 2.





PLATE XLIX

Part of scenes of the life of Buddha.

The scene, consisting of monotonously-reproduced figures of Buddha in various *mudrās*, represents the Miracle of Śrāvastī, wherein Buddha multiplied himself to the bewilderment of his critics.

1.08 m. × 87 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE I  
Part of ceiling-decoration.  
95 × 85 cm.  
Cave 2.



PLATE LI

Part of a scene of votaries bringing offerings.

For the context see pl. XLVI.

84 × 68 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE LII

Part of ceiling-decoration.

1.11 m. × 85 cm.

Cave 2.





PLATE LIII

Part of the story of the *Vidhuraṇḍita-Jātaka*.

The lord of serpents, with his queen Vimalā and daughter Irandatī, listens with devotion to the words of wisdom of Vidhuraṇḍita, who is none but a Bodhisattva himself. Behind Vidhura is the *yaksha* general Pūrṇaka, the suitor of Irandatī.

Cf. fig. 13.

85 × 66 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE LIV

Part of the story of the *Vidhuraṇḍita-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. LIII. Here Irandatī sports on a swing in the palace-garden. On the left is Irandatī again, bashfully conversing with Pūrṇaka (not included in the plate).

Cf. fig. 14.

46 × 34 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE LV

Part of the story of an unidentified *Jātaka*.

Despondently leaning against a pillar, the maiden has a feeling of anxiety writ large on her face. On the other side of the pillar is a monk (partly included in the plate).

40 × 30 cm.

Cave 2.



PLATE LVI  
Part of ceiling-decoration.  
2·37 × 2·36 m.  
Cave 2.





PLATE LVII

Part of the story of the *Vessantara-Jātaka*.

Prince Vessantara was banished for an act of overgenerosity not approved by his royal father and the people alike. Watched by sad attendants, the prince and his consort Maddi are seen here leaving the palace on exile. A beggar, with a crooked staff, is present to test the generosity of the prince. A couple, probably the royal parents, witnesses the scene of departure from the palace-window.

Cf. fig. 15.

1·20 m. × 92 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LIX

Part of the scene of the worship of Buddha.

The god Indra gracefully glides down through the clouds with his retinue, which includes musicians, to worship Buddha (not included in the plate).

Cf. fig. 16.

1.03 m. × 88 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LX

Part of the scene of the worship of Buddha.

For the context see explanation of pl. LIX. Here is a *kinnara*-couple with human torsos but bird-like tails and claws floating amidst rocks.

Cf. fig. 16.

61 × 45 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXI

Part of ceiling-decoration.

Two *gandharvas* with a common arm (only one included  
in the plate) whirl within a circle.

73 × 57 cm.

Cave 17.





PLATE LXII

Entrance to the monastery.

Over the door are eight compartments, each with a *yaksha*-couple. Above it is a row of the seven Past Buddhas and Maitreya, the Future Buddha. A sculptured figure of a deity on *makara* flanks each side of the doorway.

3·40 × 1·85 m.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXIII

Part of paintings on the door-lintel.

Cf. pl. LXII. This is the detail of a *yaksha*-couple in one of the compartments in the panel over the entrance of the cave.

40 × 24 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXIV

Part of a scene of the worship of Buddha.

Among the celestials proceeding to pay homage to Buddha (cf. pl. LXV) is a *yaksha*-couple flying through clouds.

66 × 46 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXV

Part of a scene of the worship of Buddha.

Along with other celestials (cf. pl. LXIV), a nymph moves to worship Buddha with effortless ease through the aerial region, the strong wind swaying her ornaments and tassels.

34×25 cm.

Cave 17.





PLATE LXVI

Part of the scene of the subjugation of the rogue  
elephant.

The story is that Devadatta, a wicked cousin of Buddha, let loose a mad elephant to kill Buddha at Rājagṛiha, but Buddha overcame the beast by his compassion. Here the elephant is seen tamed by a mere touch of Buddha's fingers and prostrating before him, while the citizens witness the Miracle with awe and adoration.

Cf. fig. 17.

1.60 × 1.12 m.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXVII

Part of ceiling-decoration.

1·57 × 1·36 m.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXVIII

Part of the story of the *Hamsa-Jātaka*.

A fowler has caught the Golden Goose, who is a Bodhisattva. The other geese of the flock fly away in panic.

Cf. fig. 18.

84.5 × 38 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXIX

Part of the story of the *Vessantara-Jātaka*.

For the story see explanation of pl. LVII. Princess Maddī sadly receives from her husband (not included in the plate) the news of his banishment, while a maid looks at her piteously.

55×40 cm.

Cave 17.





PLATE LXX

Part of the story of the *Vessantara-jātaka*.

For the story and context see explanations of pls. LVII and LXIX. Vessantara relates to Maddī (not included in the plate) the news of his banishment in the presence of a sad maid.

81 × 49 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXI

Part of the story of the *Vessantara-Jātaka*.

Jūjaka, a greedy and wicked Brahmin, receives ransom from king Sañjaya for having restored to the king his grandchildren. Horripilated at the jingling of coins, he grins and exposes his broken teeth. Behind the king, to his left, is a maid. One of the restored grandchildren (partly included in the plate) stands near the king.

Cf. fig. 19.

89 × 71 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXII

Part of an unidentified story.

Depicted here is a *yaksha* with a remarkably calm mien  
of the face.

30 × 24 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXIII

Part of ceiling-decoration.

1.64 × 1.05 m.

Cave 17.





PLATE LXXIV

Part of the scene of the preaching of Buddha.

This is a section of a large congregation, including foreigners, devoutly listening to the exposition of the Law by Buddha (not included in the plate).

Cf. fig. 20.

42 × 35 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXV

Part of a scene of the preaching of Buddha.

Cf. pl. LXXIV. Here is seen the preaching Buddha and the other section of the congregation, which included monks and noblemen on horseback.

Cf. fig. 20.

1.37 × 1.10 m.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXVI

Buddha in Kapilavastu.

The scene depicts Buddha's return to his birth-place Kapilavastu after his Enlightenment, when his wife Yaśodharā and son Rāhula meet him at the palace-gate. Buddha gives Rāhula his begging-bowl and admits him to the Order. Out of joy the celestials drop flowers from the heaven. The sublimity of Buddha is reflected in his halo and towering personality. The emotional content of the picture is indeed touching.

1.88 × 1.30 m.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXVII  
Part of ceiling-decoration.  
1·50 × 1·15 m.  
Cave 17.





PLATE LXXVIII

Part of the story of the *Siṃhalāvadāna*.

King Siṃhala, with a crown on his head, over which is held aloft an umbrella, sets forth with all regal splendour from the city-gate on a white elephant at the head of an army to Tāmradvīpa to conquer the demons. The accompanying vassals also ride on elephants and have umbrellas over them. The fluttering flags and the swinging trunks of elephants impart a forward movement to the scene.

1.05 m. × 80 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXIX

Part of the story of the *Siṃhalāvadāna*.

For the story see explanation of pl. LXXVIII. A treacherous ogress in the guise of a beautiful maiden lures a young man and dallies with him under a pavilion. She appears in her true form on the left above the pavilion.

1·07 m. × 77 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXX

Part of the story of the *Siṃhalāvadāna*.

For the story see explanation of pl. LXXVIII. Of immense charm, the lady, perhaps an ogress feigning love, languidly relaxes under the fondling touch of the hand of a lover (figure damaged) placed around her neck.

30 × 25 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXXI

An independent scene.

Standing in sylvan surroundings amidst hills, a youthful princess of extraordinary charm, with rich ornaments and a diaphanous drapery, is engaged in her toilet, holding a mirror in her hand. Of her two attendants, one holds a fly-whisk and the other a tray of cosmetics. A dwarf stands by, gazing at the princess.

1.23 m. × 79 cm.

Cave 17.





PLATE LXXXII

Part of the story of the *Śibi-Jātaka*.

Warriors, with weapons, flags and buntings, rejoicingly return to the capital with king Śibi (not included in the plate) after his reputation as a peerless donor has been vindicated.

1.04 m. × 72 cm.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXXIII

Part of ceiling-decoration.

2.68 × 2.32 m.

Cave 17.



PLATE LXXXIV

Part of an unidentified scene.

The bizarre youth with flowing wavy hair and a striped sash round his neck perhaps represents an aboriginal type.

39 × 26 cm.

Cave 1.

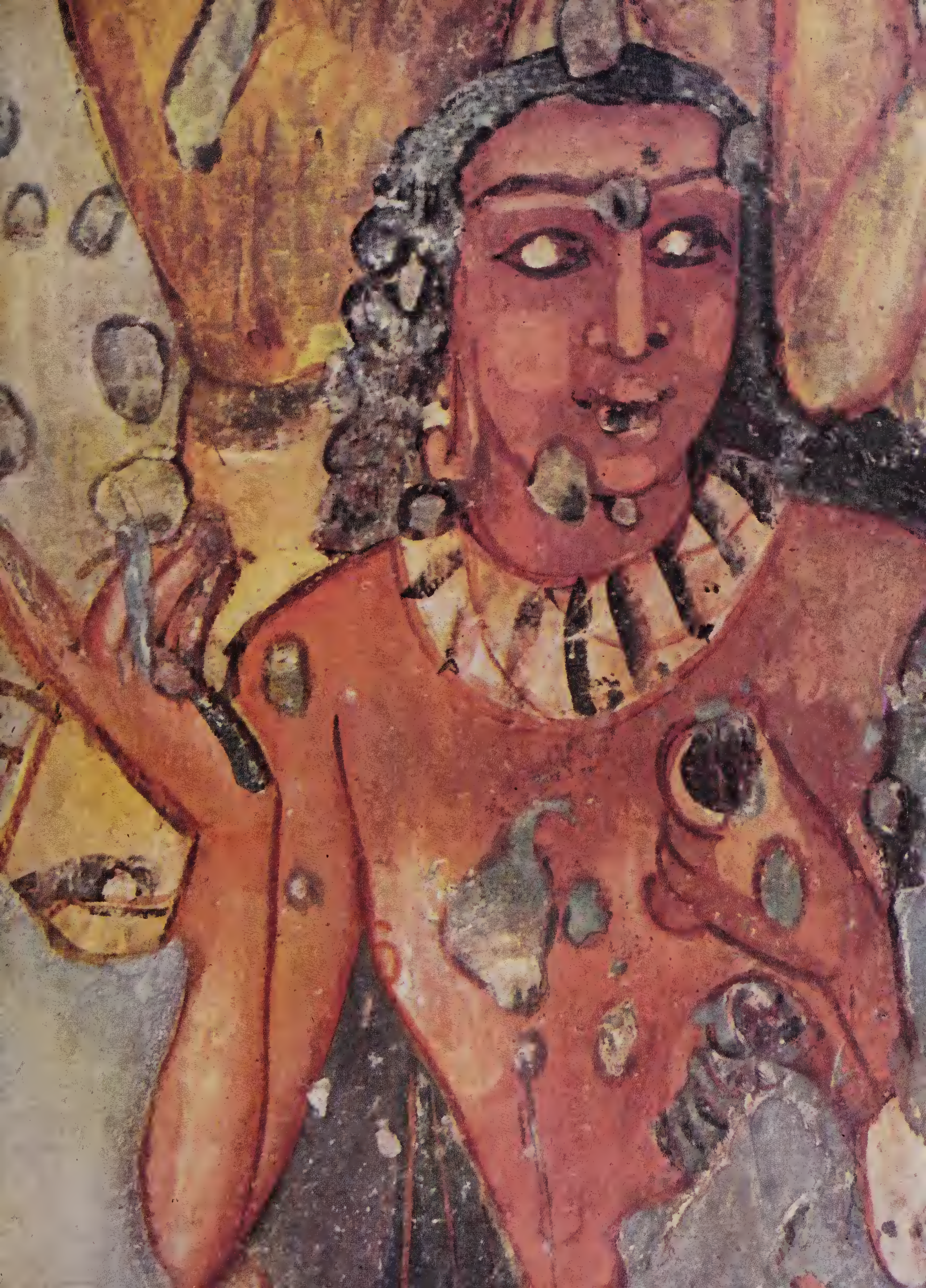


PLATE LXXXV

Conventional representations of Buddha.

1.19 m. × 60 cm.

Cave 10.







# LINE - DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1 TO 20





FIG. I

*Part of a scene of the worship of the Bodhi-tree.*

*A royal couple with retinue proceeds towards the Bodhi-tree. The costumes and ornaments are akin to those on early Indian sculpture.*

1.15 × 0.42 m.

*Cave 10.*



FIG. 2

*Part of a scene probably representing the story of the Conversion of Nanda.*

*A prince at the gate, probably Nanda (right), takes off his ornaments as if in renunciation. The news is conveyed by an anxious messenger (centre) to a princess, probably Nanda's wife Janapada-kalyāṇī (left).*

1.15 × 0.76 m.

*Cave 1.*

FIG. 3

*Part of the story of the Śaṅkhapāla-Jātaka.*

*At the centre is the serpent-king Śaṅkhapāla listening to the sermon of an ascetic, once the king of Magadha. In the gathering is a woman in the left foreground intently listening to the sermon. On the right is Śaṅkhapāla in his serpent-form.*

1.47 × 1.13 m.

Cave 1.





FIG. 4

*Part of the story of the Mahājanaka-Jātaka.*

*In the centre is a scene of dance and music designed to amuse king Mahājanaka, who, seen on the left in his palace-apartment with his queen Sivali, however, remains unmoved. On the right is again Mahājanaka, going out on an elephant to meet a saint. Note the rich architectural details of the palace in this figure and the next.*

2.27 × 1.36 m.

Cave 1.



FIG. 5

*Part of the story of the Mahājanaka-Jātaka.*

*On the left is the royal household agitated at Mahājanaka's decision to renounce the world. On the right Mahājanaka leaves the palace led by musicians and attendants.*

2.39 × 1.50 m.

Cave 1.



FIG. 6

Probably part of the story of the Mahājanaka-Jātaka (upper portion) and of the Ummagga-Jātaka (lower portion).

On the left is probably Mahājanaka in his mendicant's attire with the ladies of the royal household making offerings to him. The remaining scene shows the ceremonial bath of Mahājanaka. The lavish furnishings and royal splendour of the palace are striking.

Below is a grim scene with four severed heads, probably from the story of the Ummagga-Jātaka.

2.34 × 1.92 m.

Cave 1.





FIG. 7

*Part of the panel of Bodhisattva Padmapāni.*

2.12 × 2.07 m.

*Cave 1.*



FIG. 8

*Part of the panel depicting the Māra episode.*

*Here are seen the assault on Gautama by Māra's army and the amorous attempts by Māra's daughters to captivate Gautama and swerve him from the path of Enlightenment.*

1.63 × 1.40 m.

*Cave 1.*

FIG. 9

Part of the panel of Bodhisattva  
Avalokitesvara.

2.27 x 1.64 m.

Cave 1.



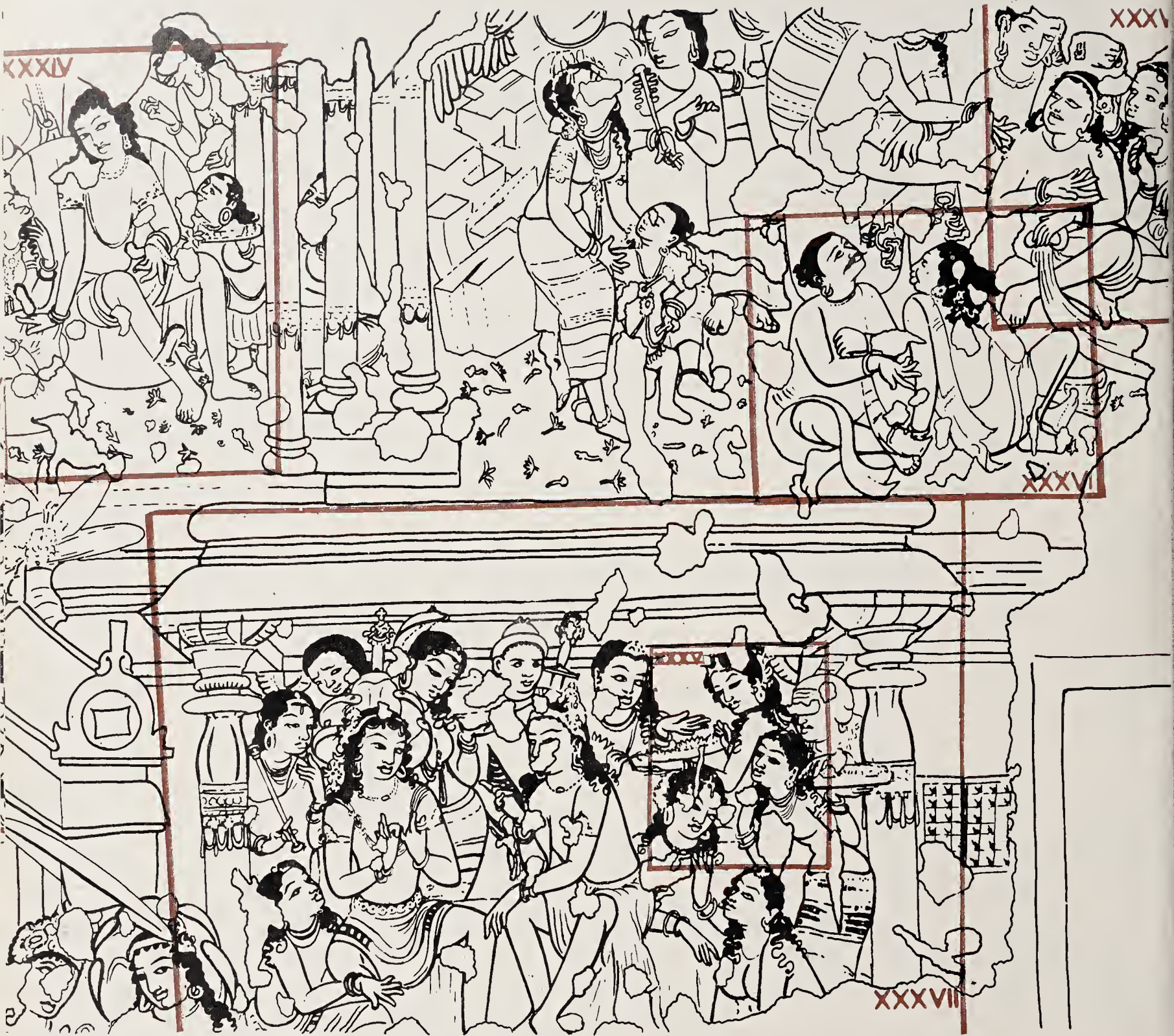


FIG. 10

*Part of the story of the Champeyya-Jātaka.*

*This reproduces the major portion of the Jātaka and shows the disposition of three successive scenes. The first scene (left) shows the serpent-lord Champeyya repenting of his life of pleasures. The second scene (right) is that of the court of king Ugrasena enjoying the tricks of the snake-charmer with Sumanā, Champeyya's queen, in the centre. The third scene (below) takes us to the nāga-world, where Champeyya preaches to the king of Vārāṇasi. The scenes are also illustrative of court-architecture.*

2.37 × 1.92 m.

Cave 1.

FIG. 11

*Part of an unidentified scene.*

1.31 × 0.92 m.

*Cave 1.*



FIG. 12

*Part of the scenes relating to the birth of Buddha.*

*On the left are king Śuddhodana and his wife Māyā, the would-be parents of Buddha, listening to the interpretation of Māyā's dream by a Brahmin. Māyā again appears on the right gracefully leaning against a pillar.*

1.28 × 0.98 m.

Cave 2.







FIG. 13

*Part of the story of the Vidhuraṇḍita-Jātaka.*

*The scene on the left shows Bodhisattva Vidhuraṇḍita preaching to the royal nāga-couple and their daughter Irandati with the yaksha general Pūrṇaka sitting behind him. In the right upper part Irandati converses with her mother, and in the balcony below are two figures engaged in conversation.*

1.42 × 1.03 m.

Cave 2.



FIG. 14

*Part of the story of the Vidhurapaṇḍita-Jātaka.*

*This is the earlier part of the story. On the left is Irādatī sporting on a swing in the palace-garden, where she is met by Pūrṇaka, her suitor. On the right is the royal nāga-family engaged in an animated discussion.*

1.11 × 0.75 m.

Cave 2.

FIG. 15

*Part of the story of the Vessantara-Jātaka.*

*The first scene (right) depicts prince Vessantara and his wife Maddī seated under a pavilion. Maddī is sad at the news of her husband's banishment and is being consoled by him. The second (left) shows the departure of the princely couple through the palace-garden.*

2.19 × 1.14 m.

Cave 17.



FIG. 16

*Part of the scene of the worship of Buddha.*

*Indra accompanied by his celestial musicians and a kinnara-couple moves through the aerial region to worship Buddha.*

1.35 × 0.92 m.

Cave 17.



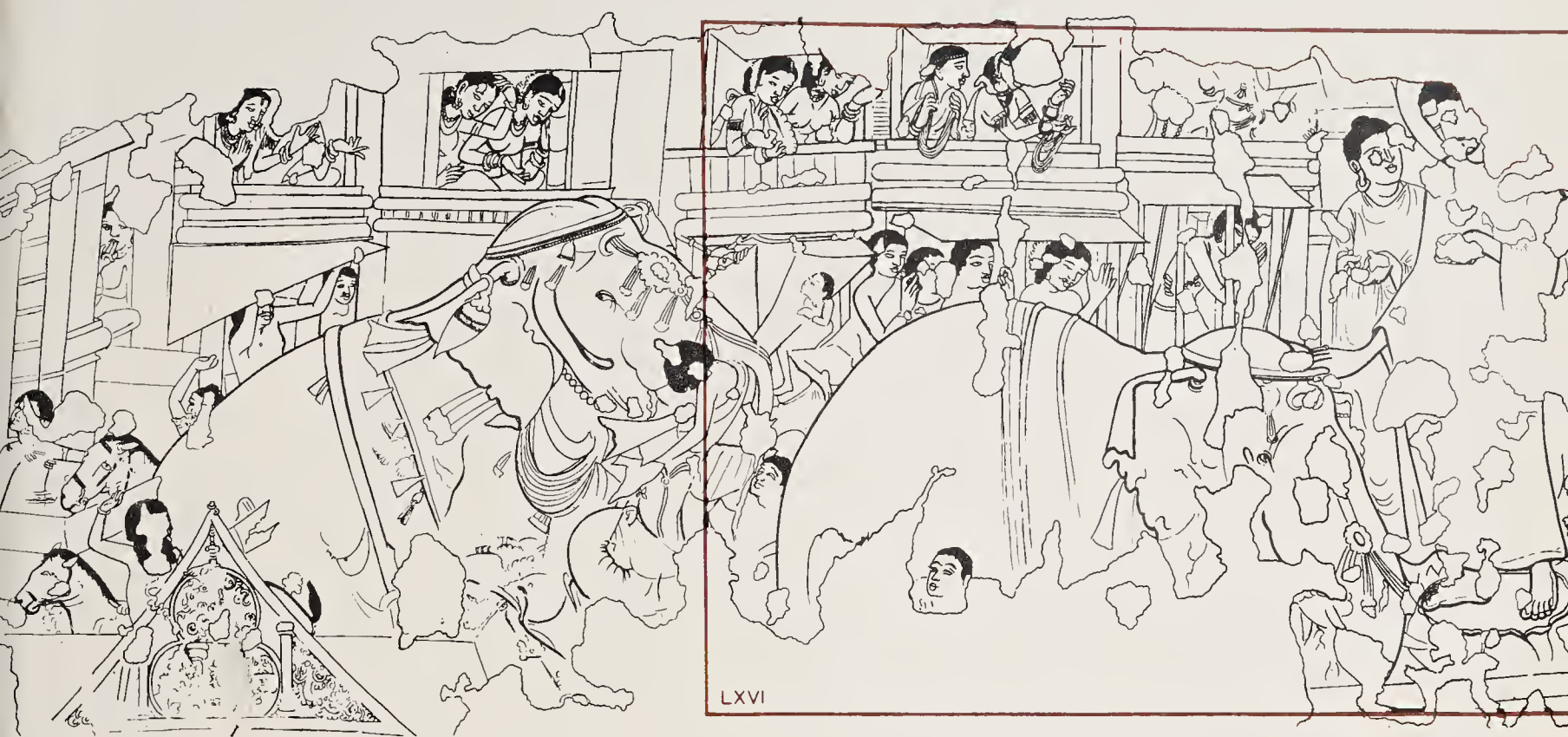


FIG. 17

*Part of the scene of the subjugation of the rogue elephant.*

*This represents a miracle performed by Buddha in a street of Rājagriha. In the first part (left), as the elephant rushes towards Buddha, trampling people on the way, the shop-keepers pull down the door-shutters and the ladies in the balconies look horrified. In the second part (right), is the elephant tamed by the overwhelming compassion of Buddha. The people witnessing the miracle bow down in adoration and the ladies jubilantly throw down their ornaments.*

2.87 × 1.21 m.

Cave 17.



FIG. 18

*Part of the story of the Hamsa-Jātaka.*

*Kshemā, queen of Bāhuputraka, longed to listen to the sermon of Bodhisattva born as the Golden Goose. The goose is caught by a fowler (right) and is taken to the royal court, where it delivers a sermon to the royal household (rest of the scene).*

1.78 × 1.45 m.

*Cave 17.*

FIG. 19

*Part of the story of the Vessantara-Jātaka.*

*The generous prince Vessantara gave away his two sons to a greedy Brahmin Jūjaka, who treated them cruelly. A person finds Jūjaka with the children (lower left) and produces them before Vessantara's father (right), who has them released by paying a ransom to Jūjaka.*

1.77 × 1.35 m.

Cave 17.





FIG. 18

*Part of the story of the Hamsa-Jātaka.*

*Kshemā, queen of Bahuputraka, longed to listen to the sermon of Bodhisattva born as the Golden Goose. The goose is caught by a fowler (right) and is taken to the royal court, where it delivers a sermon to the royal household (rest of the scene).*

1.78 × 1.45 m.

*Cave 17.*



FIG. 19

*Part of the story of the Vessantara-Jātaka.*

*The generous prince Vessantara gave away his two sons to a greedy Brahmin Jūjaka, who treated them cruelly. A person finds Jūjaka with the children (lower left) and produces them before Vessantara's father (right), who has them released by paying a ransom to Jūjaka.*

1.77 × 1.35 m.

Cave 17.





FIG. 20

*Part of the scene of the preaching of Buddha.*

*Buddha seated on a throne in the centre preaches to a large congregation of monks and noblemen, including foreigners, who have come with princely pageantry but listen with reverence to the words of the Master.*

2.65 × 2.03 m.

*Cave 17.*





SCALE OF METRES  
15 30 45



SCALE OF FEET

0 50 100 150 200

